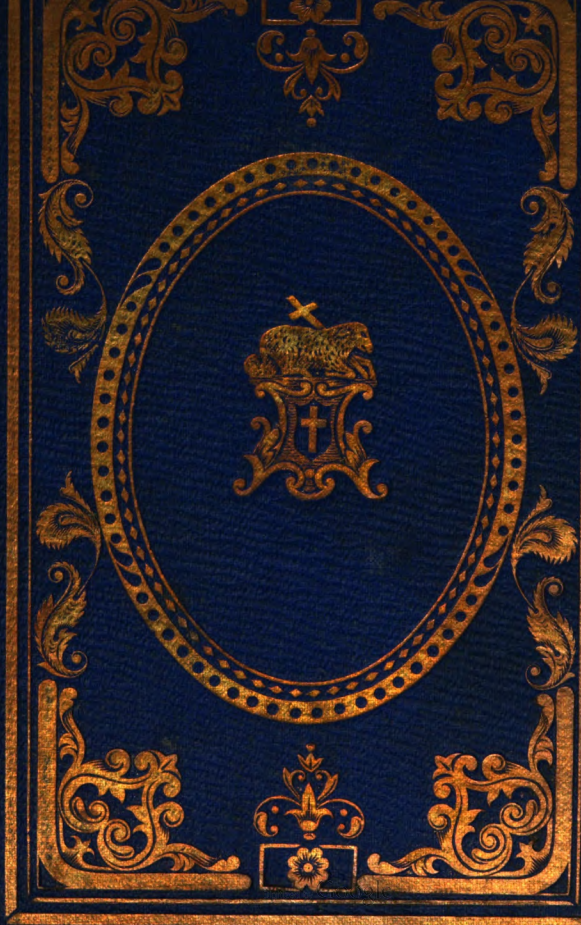

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A TREATISE
ON
GENERAL CONFESSIONS,
BY WAY OF
FAMILIAR CONVERSATION
BETWEEN
Confessor and Penitent.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE DUBLIN EDITION.

BIBLIOTHÈQUE S. J.

Les Fontaines

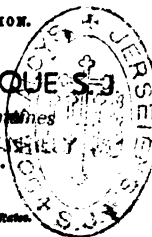
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APPROBATION.

THIS edition of "A TREATISE ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS," having been duly examined, is hereby approved of, and recommended to the faithful.

† FRANCIS PATRICK,
Archbishop of Baltimore.

BALTIMORE, May, 1852.

RELYING on the report, which has been made to us of a small work entitled "A TREATISE ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS, in the way of Familiar Conversation between Confessor and Penitent," we have much pleasure in approving of it, and recommending it to the faithful committed to our charge; earnestly hoping, that the instructions contained in it, on so important a subject, may conduce to their spiritual welfare.

† D. MURRAY.

DC BLIN, January 10th, 1852.

PREFACE

TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

THE making of a General Confession, which is a work of so much importance, and often of great difficulty, will be very considerably facilitated by the excellent instructions contained in this little work. A reading of it will satisfy any one that it comes from the pen of a judicious and experienced Director, while the high approval which it bears will recommend it, as a safe assistant to those who have the care of souls, as well as to all who seek to make their peace with God in the tribunal of Penance.

Baltimore, May, 1852.

PREFACE TO THE DUBLIN EDITION.

THE Fathers of the holy Council of Trent, speaking of the Sacrament of Penance, say, that this Sacrament is as necessary for those who fall into sin after Baptism, as is Baptism for those who have not been already baptized. According to the memorable words of St. Jerome, penance is the only plank left us, whereby, after the shipwreck of our baptismal innocence, we can hope to reach the port of Salvation.

It is unnecessary to inform Catholics that Confession is one of the parts, and an essential part, of the Sacrament of Penance, and that it is by the absolution pronounced by the Priest in the tribunal of Confession, that the grace of the Sacrament of Penance is imparted to the penitent sinner. Consequently, what we are taught to believe respecting the necessity of Penance, the same we are to hold and believe respecting the necessity of Confession.

But should our confessions be defective in any of the parts or conditions necessary for their validity, what is our remedy? Our remedy in such a case, and our only remedy, is to make over again such defective confessions. Hence it is that a repetition of past confessions may sometimes be necessary; and such a repetition, when it extends over the entire life, or a considerable period, is called a General Confession.

Considering the importance of the subject, the writer of the following pages has conceived that a *special treatise* upon general confessions should not be an unacceptable offering to the faithful. It is quite true that the general instructions found in our books of piety on the Sacrament of Penance, and upon *ordinary* confessions, are applicable, to a great extent, to the subject of *general* confessions. Nevertheless, a special guide in a concern so important seems desirable, if not necessary for popular use.

With the view of rendering the subject more interesting, and of accommodating it to the more humble capacity of many readers, the treatise is composed in the form of familiar dialogues.

The index will sufficiently point out the divisions and order pursued; and the writer, in presenting to the faithful the result of some hours' labor, snatched from his many and pressing duties, shall feel more than recompensed, if it be given him to hope, through the blessing of the Almighty, that he has in any degree lighted up the path for the Christian penitent on his return to Him, *who wills not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live.*

CONTENTS.

CONFERENCE I.		PAGE
The Cases in which a General Confession is necessary.....		9
 CONFERENCE II.		
Cases in which a General Confession is useful.....		28
 CONFERENCE III.		
Cases in which General Confessions may be repeated; also, Confessions partially general, and treatment of scrupulous persons		47
 CONFERENCE IV.		
Preparation for a General Confession.....		61
 CONFERENCE V.		
Preparation for a General Confession (continued)..		84
 CONFERENCE VI.		
Method of exciting oneself to Contrition before Confession.....		100

CONFERENCE VII.		PAGE
Immediate preparation for a General Confession, and manner of making it.....		122
CONFERENCE VIII.		
Imaginary example of a General Confession.....		129
CONFERENCE IX.		
Special observations on sins omitted in the fore- going example.....		147
CONFERENCE X.		
Means of Perseverance.....		153
FIRST MEDITATION.		
On Hell.....		104
SECOND MEDITATION.		
On the Loss of Heaven.....		107
THIRD MEDITATION.		
On the Horror and Filthiness of Sin.....		110
FOURTH MEDITATION.		
On having offended a God so good to us.....		113
FIFTH MEDITATION.		
On having offended a God so good in Himself.....		116

CONTENTS. 7

SIXTH MEDITATION. PAGE

On the enormity of sin, shown from the Passion and Death of our Saviour.....	119
---	------------

RESOLUTIONS,

To serve as a rule of life after a General Confession	183
--	------------

PRAYER

Of Saint Bernard.....	185
------------------------------	------------

A TREATISE

ON

GENERAL CONFESSIONS.

CONFERENCE I.

The cases in which a general confession is necessary.

Penitent. FATHER, I have been thinking seriously, for some time past, of making a General Confession, and I am come to request you will have the charity to give me some instructions respecting it.

Confessor. I am happy to see you, sir, at all times, but particularly so for such a purpose, and I shall be delighted to comply with your pious request. You know, of course, what a General Confession is?

Penitent. Yes, Father, I understand it to mean a confession of one's whole life.

Confessor. Just so; and sometimes it is taken also to mean a confession of a considerable period, wherein a person makes over again the confessions he made within that period.

Penitent. I have often heard General Confessions very much recommended in sermons, I have also seen the same recommendation in pious books, and I have known several persons who had made general confessions, and nothing could exceed the delight they felt after having made them.

Confessor. My excellent friend, when you say *recommended* you do not say enough; for I must inform you, that it is sometimes, and not only sometimes, but very often, our duty, not merely to *recommend* a general confession as being *useful*, but to *INSIST* upon it as being *INDISPENSABLY NECESSARY*.

Penitent. What you say, Father, renders the subject still more serious; and, perhaps, I may find out, that it would not only be a good thing for me to make a general confession, but that I have a strict obligation to do so. Pray,

Father, have the charity to inform me in *what cases a general confession is necessary.*

Confessor. I am delighted to observe that you are so deeply impressed with the importance of the information you desire; and I have only to request, that in the course of the explanations I am going to make, you will have no difficulty in interrupting me, in order to ask me any questions that may occur to you.

Penitent. Thank you, Father, I shall avail myself of your kind indulgence.

Confessor. Well, then, according to the teaching of Divines, there are FIVE CASES IN WHICH A GENERAL CONFESSION IS NECESSARY. The first case is, when a person has *knowingly* and *willingly*, through shame or any other motive, concealed a *mortal sin* in his past confessions, or, what amounts to the same in this instance, a sin which he *believed*, or, at least, *doubted* to be a mortal sin, and has continued to conceal it in his following confessions. This is the first case in which a general confession is NECESSARY. The second case—

Penitent. Beg your pardon, Father, if I interrupt you to remark, that you have said, "When a person has *knowingly* and *willingly* concealed a sin in his past confessions," am I then to understand, that if a person *omitted* or *forgot* a sin in his past confessions, *without knowing or willing* it, such a person is not bound to make a general confession?

Confessor. Certainly, such a person is not bound to make a general confession. All such a person is bound to is to mention the sin he so omitted or forgot at his next confession after remembering it. And you will also observe, that I said "*a mortal sin*," from which you will understand, that the concealment of *a venial sin* or *any number of venial sins*, considered by the penitent to be only venial sins, does not render a general confession necessary. I also said a sin which "*he believed, or at least doubted, to be a mortal sin*," for concealing a sin under such a belief or such a doubt, though the sin concealed were in itself merely venial, entails the necessity of a general confession just as much as if the sin were mortal.

Penitent. Thank you, Father, I think I now understand the first case in which a General Confession is necessary.

Confessor. Well, then, proceeding to the second case, I have to say that, a *general confession is necessary*, when a person has made his past confessions *without having examined his conscience before going to confession*, or when he has made this examination *so carelessly* as to expose himself very much to the danger of omitting thereby some mortal sin in his confession.

Penitent. I understand, Father; the class of penitents you describe are those who go to confession through a sort of routine habit, and are content to mention what comes to their mind at the moment. I am afraid, Father, there are many confessions made in this careless and negligent manner.

Confessor. Alas! my dear friend, I not only fear it, but by sad and dismal experience, know it: but, there is a day to come, *which shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness*. Yes, the day of general judgment shall expose all such

bad confessions, if not repaired by a good general confession.

Penitent. But, Father, must not some allowance be made for ignorant and dull penitents, who know not how to examine their conscience except in a very clumsy kind of way?

Confessor. Of course, particularly when such penitents show signs of earnestness, and when one can judge from their manner, that they would have examined themselves better if they knew how. If, however, together with their dulness and ignorance, they also show an indifference as regards their confessions, and a great degree of carelessness as regards their religious duties generally, I would feel it my duty to excite such penitents to an earnest concern respecting their salvation, and dispose them, in the best way I could, to make a general confession.

Penitent. And, Father, respecting confessions which people make when they are young, have you any remark to make? You know there is such levity in youth, and when one looks back upon his boy-

hood, and recollects the want of seriousness, with which, perhaps often, he went to confession, has he not reason to be uneasy about such confessions?

Confessor. What you observe is very just; however, it must be remarked that the same degree of seriousness and grave consideration cannot be expected in young people as in persons more advanced, and it is for the prudence of the confessor to decide in each case, if his penitent did bestow upon his early confessions that degree of earnest preparation, which, morally speaking, can be expected in youth. For my part, if I observed that my penitent, when young, was carefully prepared for his first communion, and had the habit of approaching the sacraments rather frequently during his youth, I would presume favorably for his confessions. On the other hand, if I found he was permitted to make his first communion without any, or with very little, special preparation, and if besides he approached the sacraments rather seldom when young, I should feel uneasy for his

early confessions, and would earnestly advise him a general confession.

Penitent. I trust, Father, I now understand the second case, in which a general confession is *necessary*.

Confessor. Well then, we shall proceed to the third. The third case in which a general confession is *necessary*, is *when a person has divided his confessions, telling some mortal sins to one confessor and some to another, and then receiving absolution WITHOUT TELLING ALL TO THE CONFESSOR WHO GIVES HIM ABSOLUTION—I mean all the mortal sins he has been guilty of since he obtained absolution the last time.*

Penitent. This, Father, is a clear case for a general confession, for I always understood the institution of penance to require that a penitent should confess *all* the sins—I should say *all the mortal sins*—he has been guilty of, since last he obtained absolution, *to the confessor who is now to give him absolution.*

Confessor. Just so—*all his mortal sins* known to him, or at least suspected by him as such.

Penitent. Well, the next case, if you please, Father.

Confessor. The next case, that is the fourth case, in which a general confession is *necessary*, is *when a person has gone to confession and received absolution WITHOUT BEING SORRY FOR HIS SINS.*

Penitent. I have always understood *sorrow for sins* to be necessary for a good confession; but I have heard so much, and read so much, about the *kind* of sorrow required, and *all the conditions* it should have, that my mind is a good deal embarrassed about it; and, to me at least, it seems difficult for a penitent, looking back upon his past confessions, to be sure that, he had always the requisite sorrow for his sins.

Confessor. This difficulty, I must tell you, is found to embarrass many penitents, particularly those of a tender conscience. I shall, therefore, endeavour to clear it up for you.

You recollect what your catechism teaches, that *an amendment of life is the best proof* that our confessions have been well made.

Penitent. I recollect, Father.

Confessor. Just so, and why? because an amendment of life is the best proof *that a penitent has been truly sorry for his sins.*

Penitent. Have the goodness, Father, to explain that a little more.

Confessor. I say an amendment of life after confession is the best proof, that a person has been truly sorry for his sins. The reason is, because true sorrow for sin must necessarily be accompanied with A FIRM PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT, and a firm purpose of amendment is generally followed by ACTUAL AMENDMENT, so that where there is no actual amendment *there*, there has been no firm purpose of amendment, and where there has been no firm purpose of amendment, *there*, there has been no true sorrow for sin, and where there has been no true sorrow for sin, *there* the confession has been sacrilegious, or at least of no effect.

Penitent. How I thank you, Father—you have made the case so clear.

Confessor. I think I shall make it still clearer by the following examples.

Suppose, for instance, a penitent who has been frequenting the company of a person, and that *as often, or nearly as often, as he has been in this person's company he has sinned grievously*, and suppose that he goes to confession and receives absolution without resolving to quit, and in effect without quitting this person's company, such a confession, and all such confessions, would be sacrilegious and should be made over again.

Penitent. I see that, Father; because if such a penitent were truly sorry for his sins, he would certainly desist from the company of the person who is to him the immediate occasion of sin; and therefore, the want of a change or amendment in that particular, is a convincing proof that he had not true sorrow for his sins, and consequently his confession was bad.

Confessor. Exactly so. Behold another example—

A person has been living in A HABIT OF MORTAL SIN, suppose a habit of cursing and blaspheming, or suppose a habit of dishonesty, or suppose a habit contrary to the holy virtue of purity, and he con-

fesses and receives absolution without correcting his evil habit, except for a few days, or perhaps not even so much, it is clear that confessions of that kind should be made over again for want of true sorrow.

Penitent. Oh! that is manifest, for if there had been true sorrow, he certainly would not pursue the same evil course again, almost immediately after his confession.

Confessor. Suppose another case. A person had his heart poisoned with spite, or malice, or hatred against his neighbor, and goes to confession without dismissing this evil feeling from his heart, as appears from the fact, that he will not be reconciled to his neighbor, and he is just as full of the evil feelings mentioned after, as he was before his confession, is it not manifest that he has no sorrow, no true effective sorrow, for his sins, and, therefore, there is no remedy for such confessions but to make them over again.

I shall add only one other example. A person OWES RESTITUTION, and has the means of paying it, but will not, or de-

lays the payment without any necessity to another and a distant time; such a person also, it must be said, is not truly sorry for his sins, and must make over again all the confessions he has made in the state described.

Penitent. Then, Father, as an amendment of life after confession must be regarded as the surest proof that we have true sorrow for our sins in confession, it is to be inferred, that when there has been true sorrow for sin in confession, the result will be a *lasting and persevering amendment*.

Confessor. No, that consequence does not follow. For a *lasting and persevering amendment* more is required than a good confession; yes, much more. Yet, it is *generally* true to say that, when a person has had true sorrow for his sins, in confession, he practically sets about amending his life, and does effectually amend it, so as that the degree of such amendment, and the length of time that it continues, will give moral evidence of the sincerity of his sorrow. I say *moral evidence* depending upon the knowledge which ex-

perience affords of the moral constitution of man.

Penitent. But, Father, you will excuse me, if I observe that no one has a better right than a confessor to know the weakness and unsteadiness of poor human nature, how we resolve most earnestly in the morning, and act, perhaps, before night, contrary to our resolution; and I am just reminded of a passage in one of the Epistles of St. Paul, where the apostle speaks of the continual warfare between the spirit and flesh, and says even of himself, *that the good which he wished it was that he did not do, and on the contrary the evil which he did not wish it was this he did do.*

Confessor. My good, dear friend, you must not urge the passage beyond the apostle's meaning, for in treating of the sacrament of penance, we must take into account that in order to realize its effects, that is in order to realize an amendment of life, God grants us grace through means of the sacrament to assist our weakness and to steady our inconstancy; and the consequence is, that if we have received

the sacrament with proper dispositions, the grace which it imparts, together with our own efforts, effects an amendment of life. This is the case *generally*, and, when I say generally, I will not deny that there are *special* and *exceptional cases*, in which a person falls back into his sins very soon and almost immediately after confession, although he had true sorrow for the same sins in confession.

Penitent. What cases are these, Reverend Father?

Confessor. For example, when a penitent is assailed by a sudden and violent temptation, or is cast into difficult and embarrassing circumstances, which may unhinge his mind, if I may so say, and put him off the pursuit of his good purposes. However, such cases, as I have said, are *special* and *exceptional*, and when they occur, a confessor will judge of them by considering them according to the circumstances they present, as also according to the trial, which the penitent underwent before absolution, in order to test the sincerity and firmness of his resolution or purpose of amendment.

Penitent. All this while we have been speaking about *mortal sin*, Father, but I think I read in some pious book, that a person might go to confession having been guilty of *venial sins only*, and that if he received absolution of *such venial sins*, WITHOUT BEING SORRY FOR THEM, he would be guilty of sacrilege. Is this true, Father?

Confessor. Nothing more true. Yet it is a case of rare occurrence, and, on that account, I would have passed it over if you had not asked about it. Generally the confessor asks for *some mortal sin* in the penitent's past life, when he has only venial sins to confess since his last confession, and the sorrow he is presumed to have for the mortal sin he mentions insures the confession. However, what you mention is sufficient reason for those who go frequently to confession to make sure of the requisite sorrow for their sins, and to be more solicitous even to excite themselves to sorrow for the sins they confess, than to go into long and minute details in confessing them.

Penitent. Dear Father, I have delayed

you too long upon this case. You will, I hope, excuse me.

Confessor. Not longer than the importance of the case merits; however, if you be satisfied with all I have said respecting it, we shall proceed to the fifth and last case.

The fifth case in which a general confession is *necessary* is *when a person has been ignorant of the principal mysteries of religion, or of the nature and end of the sacrament of penance, and has been to confession and received absolution in such ignorance.*

Penitent. But, Father, is it not the confessor's business to see to that?

Confessor. It certainly is. But sometimes mistakes occur by presuming the penitent to know his religion better than he does.

Penitent. Beyond these five cases there is no other which requires a general confession as a matter of *necessity*—don't you say so, Father?

Confessor. Yes, these five are the only cases which ordinarily require a general confession. Special individual cases from

particular causes may rarely present themselves; however, the confessor will see to them when they occur, and it is not necessary to burden your memory too much, or lengthen this conference by pointing them out. I find it is now half-past two o'clock, and I have an appointment at three.

Penitent. Oh! Father, let me not trespass one moment upon your precious time beyond your convenience; I shall be happy to come again and again, at any time you will be kindly pleased to appoint.

Confessor. Well, then, let us say one o'clock to-morrow. I have, however, a moment yet to relate to you a fact which is recorded in the life of St. Vincent de Paul, and which bears very nearly upon the subject of our conversation. When the Saint was chaplain in the family of the Marquis de Gondy, he was called to attend a sick man who lived on the Marquis's estate. On examining him he found out that his previous confessions were badly made, and that a general confession was absolutely necessary. Ac-

cordingly he exhorted him to a general confession, and, with his accustomed patience and zeal, assisted him to make it. After having discharged his conscience, the poor man was so overjoyed that he could not contain his feelings, but publicly declared to his family, and to all that came to him, that it was by a special providence that St. Vincent was sent to him—that otherwise he should be lost for ever—that though he went to confession apparently like others all his life, it would have been better for him not to have gone at all—that his confessions were all bad, and that he had only added sin to sin by them—but that Vincent had opened his eyes to the dreadful consequences that were before him, and had prevailed upon him to make a general confession, which so eased his conscience that he felt himself already almost in heaven.

Penitent. Oh! Father, what a blessing to that poor man! I am afraid that there are many who put off to the last moment the remedy of bad confessions in the same way.

Confessor. To that I shall only say, let every one look to himself, and let him do so in time.

Penitent. Just so, Father, and may God have mercy upon all poor sinners. Father, I shall be impatient for to-morrow in order to follow up with you this important subject; and allow me to thank you again and again for your charity and kindness.

Confessor. God bless you, my good friend; I shall be happy to see you again to-morrow. In the mean time pray God may more and more enlighten you and assist you by his grace.

CONFERENCE II.

Cases in which a General Confession is useful.

Penitent. SINCE I left you yesterday, I have been constantly turning in my mind the instructions you were kind enough to give me; and before we enter upon any new matter, will you allow me to repeat the cases in which a general

confession is *necessary*, in order that I may be sure of recollecting them accurately?

Confessor. By all means, for I like repetition. There is nothing better in order to acquire lasting and accurate knowledge.

Penitent. Well, Father, the cases in which you say a general confession is *necessary*, are five, namely—1st, when a person has concealed a mortal sin in his past confessions: 2dly, when he has examined his conscience so negligently as to expose himself to the danger of concealing a mortal sin in his past confessions: 3dly, when a person divided his sins between different confessors, so as not to confess to the confessor from whom he receives absolution, all the mortal sins of which he was guilty since he had received absolution before: 4thly, when a person has made his confessions without being truly sorry for his sins: 5thly, when a person has made his confessions and received absolution, having been ignorant of the principal mysteries, or of the nature and end of the Sacrament of Penance.

Confessor. Nothing could be more correct; and we shall now proceed without delay to consider the cases in which a general confession, though *not* absolutely necessary, is notwithstanding *useful and salutary*, and as such, to be by all means recommended.

Penitent. What more important subject of instruction?

Confessor. Every thing relating to the Sacrament of Penance is of vital importance, because, having lost the innocence of our baptism by mortal sin, we cannot hope for salvation except through the Sacrament of Penance. Well, then, the first case in which I would recommend a general confession as being useful is, *when a person is about entering upon a settled condition of life.*

Penitent. For example, when a young man is going to commence business on his own account, or entering on the practice of his profession, or going to get married. And why, Father, in such a case, would you recommend a general confession as being useful?

Confessor. For two principal reasons:

one regarding the past, and the other regarding the future. Regarding the past, the reason is because in youth, and before a person takes a settled position in life, his religious observances but too often partake of the levity of his years and unsettled condition; and therefore, as he looks back upon his past confessions, he sees in them at best but temporary recoveries from sin, whilst he has to behold long intervals spent in a state of enmity with his God.

Penitent. This description, Father, is widely applicable to youth, and even to young people who are considered, to use a homely phrase, very fair Christians.

Confessor. Just so; and although they may not see a clear necessity for making a general confession, they cannot be well at peace with their conscience, nor can they have all that security respecting their past confessions which a person would desire, who is truly anxious for his salvation. How advisable, therefore, would it be to clear up every doubt, and to secure perfect peace of conscience by a general confession, particularly at a period of

life, and in a condition of circumstances which presents every hope that there will be no relapse into grievous sin. And, with regard to the future, see what reason there is for recommending a general confession to the persons in question. Experience testifies that a person generally goes on through life according to the custom which he takes up in reference to his religious observances *at the time of his entering upon a fixed condition of life*. Behold, then, the advantages of a general confession *at such a time*. He brings before his mind in one view, all the sins of his past life. In consequence of viewing them altogether, he is moved to a more intense sorrow for them. In this sorrow, in proportion as it is more intense, he conceives a stronger resolution, not only of avoiding sin for the future, but of making amends to Almighty God for his past life, and this resolution being a practical and effective resolution, it embraces the means by which it is to be sustained and carried permanently into effect; that is, it engages the penitent to adopt and enter upon a new course of life—a course of

life more pleasing to God, and more conducive to his own advancement in virtue, and this at a time and under circumstances which, according to ordinary experience, furnish every prospect of his persevering. Allow me to tell you that many, many there are, who, serving God with all the fervor of their soul, and advancing from virtue to virtue, date the commencement of this happy career from a general confession they made at the time of their marriage, or when they entered otherwise upon a settled condition of life.

Penitent. Father, in what you observe, you bring to my mind what I have myself in many instances remarked, though I never inquired into the cause, nor have I heard it before accounted for, though it is so just and obvious.

Confessor. Well, having disposed of that case, we shall proceed to notice another in which a general confession would be highly useful. It is *when a person feels himself urged by a strong desire to devote himself more earnestly and fervently to God's holy service.* I do not mean the

case of a person going to consecrate himself to God in the ecclesiastical state, or in the profession of religion. In these cases a general confession is always made unless there be some special reason to the contrary. The case which I wish to notice, I shall illustrate by the following example:—Suppose a person, who, up to the present, has led a life neither remarkably good nor remarkably bad—a person who has kept up tolerably well to his religious obligations, with, however, habits which display many omissions, many neglects, much remissness and languor in God's service, with, perhaps, also a considerable degree of vanity, and other failings, which, although not grievous, yet cool down the love of God in the soul; suppose such a person touched with God's holy grace, and pressed by an earnest desire to devote himself in a new spirit—a spirit of unreserved devotion to the service of God and his own salvation and perfection, I would strongly recommend a general confession in such a case. It would close the account of the past with Almighty God, that is an account at best,

of defects and demerits, and open a new account more cheering and more hopeful—an account of virtue and of merits for eternal life. It would insure, moreover, a more fervent, as well as a more persevering co-operation with the particular grace vouchsafed by Almighty God in the case supposed. For, as we value in a special way a garment which has cost us a high price, and we endeavor to keep it clean and fresh for a length of time, so, also, by the pains we take to make a good general confession we make sure of clothing our souls with the white robe of innocence and sanctity; and we are more particular afterward to preserve it free from spot or stain of sin, and even to refresh and renew its heavenly beauty and splendor by the additional embellishments of grace, which are the constant rewards of perseverance in the fervent service of God.

This case is not an ideal or fanciful one. It is, on the contrary, a practical case, and one of ordinary occurrence. It is an article of Christian faith, that without the assistance of God's grace, we can-

not merit heaven. But, besides the ordinary graces which, in his goodness, the Almighty Giver of all good gifts continually pours down upon us, there are *certain particular graces* which He is mercifully pleased to bestow from time to time—graces of a decisive character—graces which, according to the teaching of spiritual authors, form *a sort of crisis* in the disposition which God has made of the means whereby he has designed to effect our salvation. To reject such graces might be eternally fatal; to profit of them, and co-operate with them, may insure our salvation; and, for the reasons just stated, what means can we employ more effective for profiting of, and co-operating with such graces, than a general confession? Now, the sign of the graces—these special, and, as I have said, decisive graces, or, more properly, the effect of them, is a strong desire which occasionally we feel within us to discontinue a mode of life less pleasing to God, and to devote ourselves more unreservedly to His holy service, and, therefore, it is, that I would recommend a general confession *when a*

person feels himself pressed and urged by such a desire.

Penitent. Father, from the strong reasons you have stated, I see how important it is to attend to the desire, of which you speak, when one feels it, and I am sure that a general confession is the best means to turn this desire to the account that God wishes in giving it; but allow me to ask if such a desire is felt occasionally by all Christians?

Confessor. I believe there is scarcely a Christian to whom God in his mercy does not vouchsafe it some time or other, and several times during life. Alas! however, they are THE FEW who attend to it and put it into execution.

Penitent. I have often noticed, that during jubilees, as also, missions, and retreats, many people make a general confession.

Confessor. Just so, and why? Because these are, according to the words of the apostle, *acceptable times—days of salvation*—during which God is pleased to pour out his graces with more than ordinary copiousness, and to grant those

special graces, of which we have been speaking.

Penitent. Well, if you have fully disposed of that case, Father, may I ask, if there be any other, in which you would recommend a general confession?

Confessor. Yes, I would very earnestly recommend a general confession *in the case of a person, who, either by free choice, or on account of declining years, or impaired health, withdraws himself from his occupations, and is free to devote himself more unreservedly to the concern of his salvation.* Our divine Saviour commands us *to watch at all times, because we know not the day nor the hour*, that is, not to be slumbering or slothful at any period of our life, but to be attentive, and earnest, and active, in our preparation for *the day and the hour* of our departure out of this world, and to be so, not only when this awful day and hour are at hand, which is a thing hidden from us, but at every period of our lives, so that we may continually live in such a manner as to be always prepared to die. Now, if this be the obligation of all Christians, in all cir-

cumstances, how much more is it the obligation of those who are free from the embarrassments of worldly occupations? and how much more, still, is it the obligation of those who, by their age, or state of health, should feel, that this earthly frame-work, which encases their souls, is about to go asunder, and that they must soon enter into the house of eternity? What, then, should they do? Does not religion, does not reason, does not the most ordinary common sense suggest—does not all that is to be hoped and feared in the world to come—do not the strongest motives that can be presented to the soul of man imperatively demand—that they should look forward to death, and *do that* now, whilst they have time, which they would wish at their dying hour to have done? But what could a person desire more to have done at that awful hour than to have made a good general confession? What can give more solid sustainment against the dread of past sin? What can impart more sure hope for the future? Oh! yes, the soul that has well discharged itself of her past guilt, by a

general confession, can look forward with calm and firm hope to the mercy of that all-bountiful Creator who has declared "that he willeth not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live."

Penitent. And, Father, generally in reference to persons dangerously sick, is there not the same reason to recommend a general confession to them?

Confessor. Most certainly, when they have not made one previously, and on that account, as well as on other accounts, nothing can be more condemnable, than to delay sending for the priest after symptoms of a dangerous illness have commenced to appear. Many clergymen have the habit in attending the sick, when the sick person has yet strength enough for it, to recommend a general confession, and to assist him in making it; and I know it from experience, that those who practice this habit, find constantly new reasons for continuing it.

Penitent. Am I to understand, Father, that a person, who during his life made bad confessions, could be supposed so reckless at the hour of death, as not to

desire *of himself* to repair them without the clergyman's recommendation to that effect?

Confessor. Alas! You know, that the moment of death is decisive for heaven or hell, and if the devil have had possession of a soul up to that tremendous moment, he endeavours with all his might not to lose her then; and, on the other hand, the Almighty in his wrath has threatened in several places of the Holy Scriptures, that he will abandon at the hour of death, and hand over to perdition, the soul that perseveres in sin till then. But, as we are speaking here, not of general confessions, of which there is a necessity, but of general confessions, which are to be recommended on the ground *of being useful and salutary*, I will observe, that countless instances occur in which penitents do undertake a general confession on these grounds, but before they finish they find they had *a clear and absolute necessity* for making it, and this happens in sickness as well as in health—in the very jaws of death as well as during life—on which account I have just mentioned, that

clergymen, who have the habit of inducing their penitents in dangerous illness to make a general confession, find constantly additional reasons for adhering to that practice, when they find the penitent retaining yet sufficient strength for the purpose.

Penitent. The cases you have laid down, Father, seem to me so comprehensive, that it may be simply and briefly stated, that every person ought to make a general confession one time or other during life.

Confessor. Yes, *one time or other*, and therefore it is that I have particularized the cases, which, when they occur, point out special reasons *at the time* for a general confession. And, in point of fact, I have never known in the entire range of my experience, which you know to have been both extensive and varied, a well-instructed Christian, and one solicitous for his salvation, who did not make, or desire to make, a general confession; and what I say of my own experience, I have to say, likewise, of the experience of every clergyman, to whom I have spoken upon the subject.

Penitent. What you say, Father, is very striking, as a matter of experience.

Confessor. Yes, and I lay stress upon it, precisely on this account, because it shows, that in the guidance of his elect, God's special providence in their regard, is pleased to use a general confession as a uniform means, among other means, of course, to conduct them through *the narrow gate and the strait way* to everlasting life.

Penitent. Well, Father, might I ask, why do not confessors more frequently require of their penitents to make a general confession? For it seems to me (though I should speak of such a matter with great diffidence,) that since there are so many and such important reasons, even beyond the reasons of strict necessity, for making a general confession—it seems to me, allow me to say, that a confessor would be somewhat wanting in zeal toward his penitents, in not advising them to make a general confession, when he finds they have not made one before.

Confessor. Your observation is very natural and just after all we have said

upon the subject. Let me, however, remark, that what is *in itself best* is not best *at all times and in all circumstances* to be recommended for practical adoption. The government of souls in the holy tribunal of penance, is a concern of the most delicate discretion. As St. Gregory expresses it, "it is the art of arts." In this heavenly function, as I must call it, though it is exercised on earth, the confessor has to watch with discriminating vigilance the dispositions of his penitent, and the operations of divine grace in his soul, and in order to be warranted, in ordinary cases, to recommend a general confession, on the grounds of its utility, and with a view to the greater security of his penitent, he ought to see, that he can count upon his penitent to bring to the task all that fervor and earnestness, which are required in order to perform it well, and to derive from it the fruits and advantages to be desired. If he do not see this fervor and earnestness of disposition, it would be more prudent to wait awhile, and to endeavor, in the mean time, to advance his penitent, as well as he could by his ordi-

nary confessions. He might likewise take occasion to bring before his mind the idea of a general confession, and say that he would be glad to assist him to make one, whenever he would himself be disposed to undertake it; and, by this prudent and moderate direction, he may confidently calculate that his penitent will, after a time, and with better dispositions, solicit a general confession himself. Moreover, it must be taken into account, that sometimes (and one cannot be sure of the cases at all times) a penitent may very reasonably have a reluctance to make a general confession to his ordinary confessor, and would desire to go to another for the purpose, and we must be ever cautious to leave to our penitents the most perfect freedom in this respect.

Penitent. From what you are after saying, I see how delicate and critical is your responsibility in the direction of your penitents, and I see also that, to form a practical judgment on the expediency of making a general confession, you are to see, from the consideration of various circumstances, if you can count upon your

penitent *at the time*, to make a good general confession or not, and you are to regulate your advice accordingly.

Confessor. Exactly so, and for the obvious reason, that it is better to defer it for a time with the prospect of making it better some time later.

Penitent. Father, I feel how much I have occupied your precious time to-day, and I cannot say, how indebted I am for your invaluable instructions.

Confessor. Not at all; I value my time only as I can usefully employ it. However, if it seem well to you, we shall adjourn till to-morrow. Will the same hour suit your convenience?

Penitent. Perfectly, Father; and, in the mean time, I shall occupy myself in reflecting upon the various points which you have so fully and clearly explained. In parting, Father, let me recommend myself to your prayers.

Confessor. God bless you, my dear friend; God bless you. I shall be happy to resume with you to-morrow the subject of our conversation.

CONFERENCE III.

Cases in which General Confessions may be repeated; also, Confessions partially general, and treatment of scrupulous persons.

Confessor. WELL, sir, we are to follow up to-day the subject of our conversation yesterday. Perhaps, however, you have some observations to make before we proceed to new matter.

Penitent. I should wish only, with your permission, to sum up the substance of what you said yesterday, in order that I may be sure of remembering it correctly.

Confessor. Very well—by all means.

Penitent. The main subject of your instructions was, *in what cases a general confession would be useful though not necessary*; and, as well as I recollect, you stated *four cases*:—*First*, when a person is about entering upon a settled condition of life. *Secondly*, when a person feels himself urged by a strong desire to devote himself more earnestly and fervently to God's holy service. *Thirdly*, when a person, either by free choice, or on account

of declining years or impaired health, withdraws himself from his temporal occupations, and is, thereby, free to devote himself more unreservedly to the concern of his salvation. And, *lastly*, when a person is attacked with any dangerous illness.

Confessor. Nothing could be more correct; and it is supposed, of course, in these several cases, that one has not made a general confession before.

Penitent. Yes, Father, that was supposed throughout in the whole tenor of your instructions on the subject; but, that very thing reminds me, Father, to ask if ever you would approve of a person making the same general confession over again.

Confessor. You mean, of course, a general confession *well made*, in reference to which the penitent has no reasonable doubt of its having been defective in any essential particular.

Penitent. Yes, Father, that is the case I mean: for I am to understand, that there is the same reason for making over again a general confession that has been

badly made, as there was to make it in the first instance, and sometimes a stronger reason.

Confessor. Well, then, in certain rare cases, I would approve of a penitent making over again, even a good general confession; but *I should see very sufficient reasons for doing so.*

Penitent. What, Father, would you conceive to be sufficient reasons for it? for I have known persons who made several general confessions of their whole lives.

Confessor. *In the first place*, a considerable time should have elapsed since the penitent had made his general confession; and, *secondly*, I should see that he was moved to make it over again by a sincere spirit of humility and penance, and with a view to his advancement in the practice of virtue.

First, a considerable time should have elapsed since his general confession, for, there can be no sufficient motive for making over again a confession which he made, with all the requisite conditions, only the other day.

In the second place, he should be moved by a spirit of humility and penance, and with a view to his greater spiritual advancement. Humility, as you know, must be the groundwork of all that is pleasing to God in us, and a person may very laudably seek an exercise of humility in confessing over again his past sins.

Penitent. But, Father, there are several other ways, in which he may humble himself.

Confessor. No doubt. But that does not contradict what I say, that he may humble himself by a renewed confession of his past sins. You are aware that St. Augustine published his sins to the whole world, in order to humble himself and confound himself in the sight of heaven and earth.

And a person may also be induced to do the same by a spirit of penance. The Holy Ghost tells us, in the Sacred Scriptures, that we must never be without solicitude for our past sins, and, in effect, the great models of penance, which history furnishes, renewed constantly their grief and penance for their past sins.

David, though informed through the mouth of the prophet, that God had pardoned his guilt, could not, however, refrain from constantly crying out to the Lord for mercy, begging yet more to be washed from his iniquity, and cleansed from his sins, nor could he restrain his tears, so that, every night, as he himself says, he watered his couch with his tears. St. Peter could never let his guilt in denying his Master pass away from his mind, and, whenever he heard the cock crow, his tears gushed forth afresh, so that his face was furrowed with the continual flowing of his tears, though he knew his guilt to have been pardoned. And St. Augustine—what an example!—when dying had the Penitential Psalms of David suspended about his bed, that, on what side soever he turned, his eyes were met with these inspired sentiments of a heart bruised with sorrow, and thus did he give forth his soul into the hands of his Creator, breathing in his last breath the sorrow he always kept fresh in his mind.

Penitent. But all this is different, Fa-

ther, from making over again a general confession.

Confessor. Patience, a moment. The end in view is the same. It is to renew and constantly keep alive a spirit of penance in our souls, than which, according to the examples adduced, and according to the consent of spiritual writers, as also according to reason itself, we cannot have a surer guarantee against relapse, nor a more powerful impelling cause within us to renewed efforts of zeal in the service of God. Now, what more effectual means can we employ for renewing and constantly keeping alive, as I have said, this spirit of penance, than to review our past sins in confession? And therefore it is that with that view, a person may very profitably make over again a general confession made some time ago, even with all the requisite conditions.

In fine, I have said that a person may be induced to make over again a general confession with a view to his greater advancement in the service of the Almighty. Because, as I am just after stating, the renewed spirit of penance, which results

from the renewed declaration of our past guilt, is sure to give us a new and powerful impulse in the way of virtue, and moreover, it is an occasion for renewing and strengthening our good resolutions, from which, as a matter of course, follow increased efforts for our spiritual advancement.

Besides these reasons, the lives of the saints furnish very many instances of saints who made several general confessions. However, as I have already observed, I should be well satisfied of my penitent's having good and sufficient motives, before I would consent to a repetition of a general confession already well made; nor could I approve of his doing so merely because he conceived, in a vague and general way, that it would be a good thing to do, or because he heard of pious people having done so.

Penitent. In case you would allow a repetition of a general confession already well made, would you bind your penitent to the same exactness as in the first general confession respecting the declaration of *all* his mortal sins?

Confessor. By no means; for the object in view, a general outline comprising the leading failings and more prominent habits, would be sufficient, without entering into minute details.

Penitent. I have heard of confessions *partially* general, as I may term them, that is, confessions reaching back to a former general confession, and repeating the various particular confessions since then.

Confessor. Yes, and there are some persons who have the habit of making annual confessions, comprising the various confessions of the year. The reasons affecting both cases are in substance the same. As long as we are in this world, our life, as holy Job declares it, is a warfare. The enemies of our salvation allow us neither peace nor truce; these enemies, as St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians describes them, are not only flesh and blood, but "*principalities and powers, the rulers of the world of this darkness, the spirits of wickedness in high places.*" On which account we must, according to the exhortation of the same apostle, "*take up*

the armour of God, that we may be able to resist in the evil day, and stand perfect in all things." (c. iv.)

We must, according to his own example, fight, not as if *beating the air*, but we must fight *the good fight*, which is to be renewed every day we live, and which is to terminate in victory only by our perseverance to the end. Now, what is to be feared in this continual battle is, that we may slacken our energies, and by degrees become remiss; here it is that Christian vigilance is particularly required against the *adversary who goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*. This slackening of our energies, however, and this growing remissness may be so insensible—going on, and gaining upon us *by little and little*, that from one confession to another we may not notice our decline, which may also escape the notice of our confessor. Observe, then, the advantage of going back upon our ordinary confessions, and repeating them since a certain period. By doing so a penitent sees, and makes his confessor see, what he has lost, how far he has gone back, what failings

are growing upon him ; and the ordinary result to be expected is, that with God's holy grace, the assistance of his confessor, and the energy which such a confession is sure to excite, he will not only recover from any remissness into which he had fallen, but fight more vigorously than ever the battle of his salvation.

Penitent. But, Father, am I to understand that it is a general thing, even among pious people, to be losing ground, in the manner you have described ?

Confessor. We have all of us, even the best of us, to dread it, and according to the universally received axiom, *not to advance is to go back in the way of salvation.* But let me suppose a soul advancing with steady pace in the ways of sanctity and perfection, there is always (to use a common phrase) room for improvement ; all human perfection here below is imperfect, on which account the Holy Ghost calls upon him *who is just to be still more justified*, and upon him *who is holy to be still more sanctified*. Now, with a view to this constant advance in the ways of justice and sanctity, nothing can be more

useful than a confession, such as we are considering, which sums up our ordinary confessions since a certain period. It makes us see, and what is more important, it makes our confessor see in a more perfect manner, the state of our soul, and what means are advisable in reference to our further progress, while the increased fervor which results from such a confession insures our carrying these means into practical effect.

Penitent. But is there not reason to apprehend scrupulosity from this repetition of past confessions, and I have often heard that scrupulosity is a great obstacle in the way of virtue?

Confessor. It is for the confessor to pay attention to that. For my part, I am satisfied that it is not the repetition of past confessions that produces scrupulosity, so much as it is scrupulosity that urges some persons to desire such repetitions. It must be granted, however, that if a penitent afflicted with scrupulosity be allowed, without a clear cause of necessity, to go back upon his past confessions, there is every danger of his con-

science, so far from being relieved, becoming on the contrary more embarrassed. But we cannot mistake such cases when they present themselves, and while we treat them with all mildness and sympathy, we feel it our duty at the same time to be inflexible in not allowing them to repeat their past confessions. We insist also upon a complete submission of judgment, as well as of will, to our direction, and that the penitent will commit all his solicitude to our responsibility.

Nothing can be more true, as you remark, than that scrupulosity is a great obstacle in the way of virtue, and I will add, a most dangerous snare laid for pious souls. It renders the sweet yoke of our Lord distasteful, and his burden heavy, though he wishes it to be light; it makes the practices of religion disagreeable; it takes away all consolation from the observances of piety; and by this means, a soul virtuously and piously inclined, is tempted through disgust to abandon her God. It likewise turns away our attention and vigilance from essential matters, and rivets our whole mind upon trifles,

which it magnifies into matters of the greatest importance; like an acute pain in some part of the body which, however, is of no account in reference to general health, but which sometimes engages our concern more than a disease which threatens imminent danger. It also renders a penitent dissatisfied with the direction of his ordinary confessor, and urges him to go from confessor to confessor, thus depriving him of what he most needs, a steady and uniform director; and its multiplied dangers are the more serious because disguised under the deceptive appearance of piety, for there are no dangers so much to be dreaded as those which threaten us when the spirit of darkness transfigures himself into an angel of light. Let me repeat, scrupulosity is not only an obstacle, and a great obstacle, to piety and virtue, but a most dangerous source of temptation; and the devil has succeeded, and does succeed every day, in precipitating into sin countless souls, whom he could not seduce by the open temptations of vice. However, we have no difficulty in discovering such souls,

and if we can render them obedient to our direction, their cure is in our hands.

Penitent. Father, I feel how unwarranted I am in troubling you to make these explanations.

Confessor. Why, my friend?

Penitent. You have been explaining, all this while, matters which relate to refined piety and scrupulosity, and, God help me! so far from such explanations being suited to me, I feel crushed down to the earth under the weight of sin; and I have a general confession to make, not of a year or two years, nor merely from reasons of utility much less from scrupulosity, but a general confession of my whole life, and one which I now see from your excellent instructions to be absolutely and indispensably necessary.

Confessor. Confidence, my dear friend. Remember the parable of the shepherd and of the strayed sheep, remember the prodigal, and the other motives which religion furnishes, of hope in God's mercy. So far from feeling it a trouble, I am delighted in explaining to you every thing you desire to know, and in showing

you, not only the way to pardon and forgiveness, but also the means by which, with God's grace, I hope to see you ascending from virtue to virtue.

Penitent. God bless you, Father. How I am indebted to you. Can I count on your charity to-morrow again?

Confessor. Yes, by all means. The same hour as to-day, I suppose?

Penitent. Your own convenience, Father.

Confessor. Very well, the same hour. May God bless you, my good friend, and assist you in your good purposes and pious endeavors.

CONFERENCE IV.

Preparation for a General Confession.

Penitent. Father, before you commence to-day, might I ask you to repeat in brief the leading particulars of your instructions yesterday, for you will excuse me, if I have not been able to fix them well in my memory.

Confessor. I am not at all surprised, for our conversation yesterday was not very orderly, and we dwelt upon topics somewhat out of the ordinary path of religious practice, and, as you termed them, *refinements* of piety.

Penitent. Pardon me, Father, if the expression be an improper one.

Confessor. Not at all; it is quite intelligible, and even significant. Well then, looking back, we spoke in the first instance of the repetition of a general confession already well made, and we said that not only may it be allowed, but that it would be highly profitable, when *first*, a considerable time had elapsed since the previous general confession; and, *secondly*, when the penitent would be moved to make it by a spirit of humility and penance, and with a view to his greater spiritual advancement. We observed, however, that the penitent is not bound to be strictly exact as to the declaration of *all* his sins in this repetition.

In the second place, we spoke of confessions *partially* general, as we explained, and of *annual* confessions, repeating the

particular confessions within the year, or any other period, as the case may be; and we showed the advantage of such confessions to consist, *first*, in detecting for our own observation, and still more for the observation of our confessor, any decline that may have taken place in our fervor, or any habits of tepidity or remissness that may be growing upon us; and in the *second* place, by thus exposing the state of our soul since a considerable period, we see, and our confessor sees, what means we should adopt to invigorate our fervor, and fortify anew our good purposes.

In the third place we spoke of scrupulosity, and showed how a confessor, treating such a malady with all due consideration and mildness, is to be decided not to allow his penitent to go back upon his past confessions, without the clearest reasons of necessity for doing so. These are the chief heads, as well as I recollect, of our conversation yesterday.

Now it seems to me, that in all we have explained, we have sufficiently cleared the way to proceed to the con-

sideration of how a penitent is to prepare himself for a general confession.

Penitent. Dear Father, how important this subject; and I am quite impatient to hear you on it. I have, however, a question, which you will allow me to ask you, before you begin, lest it should escape my mind afterwards.

Confessor. What is it?

Penitent. Perhaps I should have some delicacy in asking it. We know of course that you all exercise the same ministry, and that the absolution of one confessor is as valid as that of another; still we make distinctions; it may be our own weakness, but so it is; we have our preferences and predilections in selecting a confessor. Would you have the kindness to say, Father, if we be warranted in such distinctions.

Confessor. I am glad you have thought of that subject, for I have more than one observation to make upon it. *First*, I would advise you, in judging of clergymen, to regard them in general according to their ministry, and to view them according to the words of St. Paul, "as

ministers of Christ, and dispensers of the mysteries of God." *In the second place*, I do condemn those humors and fancies entirely human, which, at the expense of time, and at great domestic inconvenience, very often take people to a distance in order to go to confession to a particular confessor, passing by a dozen perhaps of excellent confessors on the way; and I condemn still more these humors and fancies when indulged to such a degree, as to keep the penitent from going to confession *as usual*, if the confessor be for a time absent, or if from other reasons he cannot have recourse to him.

In the third place, having thus expressed myself in reference to the penitents in question, I am ready to make every allowance in favor of penitents, who can account to themselves before God, for sufficient motives in their choice of a particular confessor in preference to others more at hand. There is no relation on earth more precious than that of confessor to penitent. He is another angel guardian, and looking forward to eternity, the penitent has to rely upon his confessor for

the lights necessary for his guidance through the darksome paths of this world.

It is, therefore, in every way reasonable, that a penitent should be attached with a holy and supernatural leaning of mind to a confessor, under whose guidance he has been for some time, and, that, at the sacrifice of time and convenience to a reasonable extent, he should endeavor to continue under his spiritual care.

Beyond this motive, an additional one may be, the importance of a steady and uniform direction, more particularly if the penitent have an embarrassed conscience, and if, moreover, he be placed in circumstances of a difficult and critical kind.

Penitent. Father, how glad I am to have asked you upon this subject, for I have noticed, what you have observed, pious people going a great distance to confession, and if I recollect well, I have seen something in a pious book to the effect that we ought to be very particular in the choice of a confessor.

Confessor. I have not said yet all I

wish to say on the subject. However, in reference to what you have seen in some spiritual authors, I wish to observe, that we must not urge too far that advice. It applies rather to other times and to other countries, where in consequence of the number of clergymen, there are many, who have but little practice in confessional duty, and, on that account, are wanting in the most essential requisite of a good confessor, namely, *experience*. But in this country, there is scarcely a clergyman who has not ample confessional practice; and I exult in the thought, moreover, that otherwise, as a body, our clergymen are eminently deserving the confidence of their flocks.

Penitent. I join you heartily in this tribute to the merits of our clergy.

Confessor. Well, then, returning to the subject, I will, *in the fourth place*, observe, that as there may be very sufficient reason for choosing a particular confessor, there may also be very sufficient grounds of objection to a particular confessor. If, for instance, placed in particular circumstances, or occupying

a particular position, or if, on personal grounds, a penitent should feel restrained from that open disclosure of mind which is required, not only for the integrity of confession, but for the purpose of direction, he is by all means to be advised to seek a confessor in reference to whom he would have no such reserve.

And as we are treating particularly of a general confession—a confession, upon which, in all likelihood, eternity is staked, a penitent should deny himself no facility or advantage for making it well; on which account he should seek in *the first place*, a confessor, in reference to whom he has the least possible feeling of reserve, and *secondly*, one, who has the reputation of hearing general confessions, and in whose hands the penitent will find the task of a general confession comparatively simplified and rendered easy.

Penitent. I thank you, Father, for this painstaking explanation, which is, at the same time, so practical. If you please to proceed now to the preparation one should make for a general confession.

Confessor. On this most important sub-

ject, *the first thing* I would advise is, that a person would undertake the task of a general confession, not merely with a view of cleansing his soul from past guilt, in the most perfect manner, through means of the sacrament of penance, but still more, that he would propose to himself to enter thenceforth upon a new manner of life, whereby he is, with the aid of God's grace, not only to avoid falling back into mortal sin, but to make atonement for all that has been amiss in his past life, by spending the remainder of his time in this world in holy endeavors to advance, from day to day, in the fervent service of the Almighty. Alas! alas! too many there are, who seem to think that all is well with them, when they have finished their general confession, and take no account of what our dear Saviour teaches us, that, when the evil spirit is expelled from our souls, by means of a good confession, he is sure to return soon again, and seeks, by his temptations, to be admitted anew, and, succeeding in his endeavors, he brings with him *seven other spirits more wicked than himself*, so as to

secure more fatally, in future, the possession of the soul from which he had been expelled; and hence it comes to pass that the latter state of such a soul, as our Saviour declares, is worse than the former. Alas! and a thousand times, alas! in such a soul the parable is woefully realized of "the dog returning to his vomit, and of the sow that was washed returning to her wallowing in the mire." On this account there is nothing to be recommended so earnestly to a person preparing for a general confession, as a fixed determination, not only of rising from his past sins, for a time, but *of walking in newness of life* perseveringly thenceforth to his dying hour.

Penitent. Father, through the grace of God, that is my fixed determination.

Confessor. May God enable you to keep it. *The second thing* I would recommend him, is to free himself, *as much as he can* for the time, from all other concerns, however legitimate or praiseworthy they otherwise may be.

Penitent. What do you think, Father, of a retreat for the purpose?

Confessor. The very best thing he could

do; and how I wish that we had in this country houses of retreat, as there are on the continent, open not only to ecclesiastics, but also to lay people.

Penitent. I have known lay persons to have made retreats in some of the houses of the Jesuits, and also of the Missionaries; and, I suppose, you have heard of the retreats which take place from time to time—retreats for ladies of the world in some of the houses of the Loretto Nuns. I am given also to understand that other convents, particularly educational convents, are always open to individuals desiring to make retreats.

Confessor. All this is only the beginning of what I hope we shall soon see, namely—*regularly established retreat houses*; and it may be expected, that that admirable society, the Society of St. Vincent of Paul, which has for its object, not only the good of their fellow-creatures, but still more, their own spiritual advantage, will lead the way in setting on foot a practice, from which such blessed fruits would be sure to result.

But while thus earnestly recommending

a spiritual retreat to a person making a general confession, I would be content, in order not to place any obstacle in his way, if he would for the time take away his attention from every other concern as far as possible.

The third thing I would recommend is, that he would give himself most earnestly to prayer, in order to obtain the Divine assistance, without which all his efforts would be entirely unavailing. And, for the same end, I would also advise him to *give some alms, and to practice some fasting*, not only because such means are recommended by the Holy Ghost for obtaining the forgiveness of sin, but because, in all that we undertake, our will becomes greatly strengthened by making some sacrifices of that kind, with a view to the end which we propose to ourselves.

Penitent. All this is very plain, Father, and I understand it thoroughly; but what terrifies me is the examination of conscience.

Confessor. That is what I am just going to treat of as the *fourth thing* in preparing for a general confession.

Penitent. Oh! Father, the examination of conscience—the bringing to light the hidden things of darkness, the unravelling mysteries of iniquity spread over so many years gone by—the very thought of it, Father, frightens me.

Confessor. Patience, my good friend, patience—you must not needlessly alarm yourself. You will calmly attend to the explanation I am going to give you on the subject, and you will find that the difficulties which frighten you, are, to a great extent, imaginary, and perhaps, I may add, temptations, by which the enemy of your salvation would frighten you away from undertaking your general confession.

Penitent. God bless you, Father, and may He assist me to understand you upon this subject, which has been to me a subject of so much pain and solicitude.

Confessor. You will understand the following case, which will serve to throw light upon the subject:—

Suppose that you had dealings with a merchant for a lengthened series of years, and that you had no settlement of accounts all the time, and kept no account of the

various things you received from him ; at length he furnishes his account, and you are shocked at the length of it, and at the vast number of items it contains. Suppose that case, and, let me ask, as a man of business, what would you do ? I am sure you would not cast it away from you and say, "How can I remember what I got, or did not get, throughout a period of so many years." On the contrary, the difficulty, or, if you will, the impossibility of recollecting every single item would be the very reason why you would examine the account the more carefully. And how would you proceed in this examination ? You would, I am sure, examine it, not by looking through it here and there in a confused manner, but you would begin at the beginning of the account, and you would pause at the very first item to recollect if you had got the thing set forth in it. Nor would you be satisfied with recollecting that, but you would further challenge your memory to recollect if you had got that thing *to the amount* set forth, and it would be only then you would proceed to the second item. The second item

you would examine in the same way, and pass in this slow, and orderly, and painstaking way from item to item, endeavoring, with regard to each, to recollect *not only* whether you got it or not, but if you got it *to the amount* set forth. Do you understand the case I make?

Penitent. I do, Father, perfectly; but I am afraid I don't see fully to its application.

Confessor. Well, please God, you will see to that presently. You have an account (have you not?) with the Almighty God—an account of sin.

Penitent. Alas! Father, I have a long one, and a complicated one.

Confessor. Just so. Well, then, as the difficulty, or the impossibility of remembering every single item in the merchant's account would be to you a motive for increased diligence in the examination of it, *item by item*, so also the difficulty or the impossibility of recollecting *every single sin* in your account with the Almighty should, likewise, be to you a motive for a more diligent examination of that account, proceeding through it patiently and care-

fully *from one sin to another* in due order, and delaying upon the examination of each until you would find out, *first*, whether you were guilty of it or not, and, *in the second place*, if guilty, *how often*.

Penitent. But, Father, the merchant furnishes a *written account*, which I can read at leisure, and which I can follow up without confusion.

Confessor. So also, I may say, does Almighty God in the table or catalogue of sins, which you have in your prayer-book; and you have only to proceed in the manner I have just stated, through this table or catalogue, pausing at each question to find out whether, as I have already stated, you have been guilty of the sin therein mentioned, or not, and if guilty, how often.

Penitent. Father, how I am relieved; I now see through the difficulty, in a great measure, which so much embarrassed me.

Confessor. Well, I think, I shall diminish yet more this difficulty for you.

Penitent. How grateful I ought to be.

Confessor. Well, first of all, you will remember, what I am sure you already

know, that, in looking through the table of sins, you need not concern yourself about *venial sins*. *Venial sins* are, as divines say, the *free matter* of the sacrament of penance, and the reasons *recommending* the declaration of them in ordinary confessions, do not apply to a general confession. At all events, it is amply sufficient to mention them in a general way—in a way which will cost you no trouble either in the examination of your conscience or in your confession afterward. Does not that lessen the account—setting aside all venial sins?

Penitent. It does, Father, for in ordinary accounts, small items are often more troublesome than large ones.

Confessor. Precisely so. Well, then, in the examination of *mortal sins* you have only *one out of three* things to find out in each case—*One out of three things*, observe. And let me tell you, if you observe this, all the difficulty is at an end. The three things are:—*First*, HOW OFTEN you have committed such a mortal sin, in case you can recollect how often *with certainty*. *Secondly*, IN OR ABOUT HOW OFTEN,

when you can recollect how often with *probable correctness*, though not with exact certainty. *Thirdly*, HOW LONG the habit of such a sin continued, and HOW OFTEN IN THE WEEK, THE MONTH, OR IN THE YEAR you used to commit it, during that time, when you cannot recollect how often *altogether* either with certainty or with probable correctness.

Penitent. Father, might I ask you to illustrate by an example what you have just explained?

Confessor. Very well. Suppose you are examining yourself upon the sin of drunkenness, and you recollect *with certainty* how often *altogether* in your life you were drunk, you prepare yourself to mention in confession you were drunk *so often*; but suppose you cannot recollect with certainty how often, you recollect *in or about* how often, then you prepare yourself to say in confession you were drunk *in or about so often*. And, lastly, suppose it was a *habit* you had of getting drunk, and you cannot say *how often* nor *in or about how often*, in that case you prepare to accuse yourself in this way, "Father,

I had the habit of getting drunk; this habit continued so many years (mentioning the time,) and during that time, one month with another, I used to get drunk as well as I can recollect, so many times each month," mentioning again the number of times.)

Thus, by attending to *the three things* I have mentioned, one or other of them will be found to answer every possible sin, so that scarcely does any further difficulty remain.

Penitent. But suppose, after all, a person forgot some mortal sin.

Confessor. Well, suppose he did, after taking all the pains he could in his examination; all that he is bound to is, to mention the sin so forgotten in his next confession.

Penitent. And, Father, his confession is nothing the worse on that account?

Confessor. Not in the slightest degree.

Penitent. How comfortable to be assured of that, and how much more of the difficulty does that remove! But, Father, I have often heard preachers laying great

emphasis upon *the specific* and *numeric distinction* of sins, as they termed it.

Confessor. And sure there is no difficulty in that; *the numeric distinction* of sins means *how often* in one or other of the three ways I have mentioned a person has sinned. It may happen also that the one and the same act will comprise two or more distinct sins of the same kind. When, however, such a case occurs, it presents very little embarrassment; for though it might possibly escape the penitent, the confessor will be sure to notice it. And as to the *specific distinction*, that means that you would mention every sin *by its proper name*, and that you would not mention one sin meaning another.

Penitent. That makes these theological words very plain and simple. But I think I heard also great stress laid upon *the circumstances* of sin.

Confessor. Yes, the circumstances of sin are two-fold, one kind of circumstances *changing* the nature of the sin, or *adding* to it the guilt of another sin entirely different, and the other kind *increasing* the guilt merely. The circumstances *chang-*

ing the nature of the sin, or *adding* to it the guilt of a sin entirely different, are to be confessed always, when there is question of mortal sin. But a penitent with the aid of his confessor can scarcely mistake them.

Penitent. An example, Father?

Confessor. Yes; suppose a person to have stolen an article of property belonging to his neighbor, the act is simply an act of injustice or dishonesty. But suppose him to have stolen an article of property consecrated to sacred uses, for instance a chalice; such an act, besides being an act of dishonesty, should also be an act of sacrilege, and therefore the circumstance of the article *being sacred* should be explained, and it would not be enough to say simply "I have stolen an article of property amounting in value to so much."

Penitent. I see, Father; a penitent could scarcely mistake a distinction so palpable. But allow me to ask, is there any class of sins in which these circumstances of which we are treating are more liable to occur?

Confessor. Yes, in the sins against the sixth and ninth commandments, as I shall explain to you hereafter.

Penitent. Well, Father, the other class of circumstances, which merely *increase* the guilt of sin, without changing it, or adding to it the guilt of another different sin?

Confessor. Yes, such circumstances are also to be confessed, *when they so increase the sin as to make it mortal*, whereas otherwise it would have been venial. But if they *only* increase the guilt of a sin *already* mortal, it is not necessary to confess them, unless, indeed, they render the sin *very enormous*, in which case it would be always safer to confess them, and, in some instances, from special causes, there would even be an obligation to do so.

Penitent. What do you think, Father, of noting down in writing one's confession, in order to aid his memory in making it?

Confessor. Yes, *noting it down*—I would approve of doing so. But it sometimes happens that penitents undertaking to *note down* their confession, *write out a sort of history* of their life, with details

and lengthened explanations totally unnecessary and highly embarrassing to themselves, as also highly annoying to the confessor.

Penitent. How then, Father, would you recommend it to be done?

Confessor. Just as we have said—by *noting it down*, that is, by expressing in writing each sin to be confessed *by a single word*, and the number of times, or duration of habit *by a figure*; and I would advise even this much to be done in a manner intelligible only to the penitent himself, so that if the paper fell by accident into other hands, it could not be understood. Confessors in general, who have much practice in hearing general confessions, would have you fold up your paper at confession, and you would find at the end, that by the examination you had made, and by their assistance, every thing would be cleared up that you had noted down. However, brief notes, as I have mentioned, would in all cases be useful, and if the penitent be left to his own endeavors in making his confession, they

would be almost necessary to aid his memory.

Perhaps we have sufficiently lengthened out this conference; and if I can have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow, would you find ten o'clock a convenient appointment?

Penitent. Quite so, Father; and in parting I beg to recommend myself to your good prayers, and would you have the charity, moreover, to remember me, a poor sinner, in the holy sacrifice to-morrow morning.

Confessor. I shall make it a duty to do so. God bless you, my good friend, and I shall be happy to resume with you at ten to-morrow.

CONFERENCE V.

Preparation for a General Confession, (continued.)

Confessor. WELL, sir, we shall commence to-day by a short review of the matter of our conversation yesterday. We began, you remember, by speaking of the

choice of a confessor, and especially of a confessor for a general confession; after which, we proceeded to the preparation requisite for a general confession. In this preparation we noticed that a person should, *in the first place*, enter upon the task with the fixed purpose of never more returning to sin, but on the contrary of leading thenceforth a truly Christian life. *In the second place*, we stated that he should withdraw himself as much as possible, from every other occupation for the time, in order to engage all the energies of his mind in the truly important work he has on hand. *In the third place*, we insisted upon the necessity of earnest prayer, to which we recommended that he would unite fasting and alms, in order to obtain the Divine assistance. *Lastly*, we spoke at large of the examination of conscience, showing that it is not so difficult a task as people generally imagine, and we laid down a simple and easy method for making this examination.

The next topic which follows in order is the *sorrow* requisite for confession; but as there is nothing particular in reference

to a general confession to be noticed in this sorrow, or in other words, as the sorrow required for a *general* confession, is in every way the same as that required for an *ordinary* confession, it is not necessary that we should delay upon it, as you will find it treated in the instructions contained in your prayer-book, on the Sacrament of Penance.

Penitent. I should be sorry, dear Father, to occupy your precious time unnecessarily, for one instant, but I cannot forbear telling you what a privation it would be to me, not to have from you a few words upon this most important subject. I should be content even with a summary notice of the chief points to be attended to.

Confessor. Well, so much shall not delay us long. I am glad to find that you are convinced already of the *necessity of being sorry for our sins* in order to obtain pardon of them in the sacrament of penance, on which account I shall not delay upon that point. Again, I feel it unnecessary to notice the distinction between *contrition* and *attrition*, or in other words, be-

tween *perfect* and *imperfect* contrition or sorrow for sin, as it will be sufficient for our purpose to notice *the conditions or qualities of the sorrow requistes for the pardon of sins in the tribunal of penance.*

Penitent. Precisely so, Father; for that is the only matter of concern to the poor sinner going to confession.

Confessor. Well, to enumerate these conditions or qualities, they are six, viz.: that the sorrow be *interior, supernatural, supreme, universal, accompanied with a hope of pardon, and with a firm purpose of amendment.*

You will not be alarmed by these theological expressions, as I shall make them very plain by a word of explanation on each.

First, our sorrow for sin must be *interior*; that is, a sorrow not consisting in sighs nor tears, nor any *outward* signs, but in the *inward feelings and affections of the heart*; on which account, when we recite an act of contrition we say, "O my God, I am most heartily sorry," &c.

Secondly, our sorrow for sin must be *supernatural*; that is to say, it must be

conceived not on account of any *earthly* or *natural* motive, but on account of some motive or motives of *religion*. The motives recommended in order to excite this supernatural sorrow are given in the catechism. They are, as you remember, the fear of hell, the fear of losing heaven, the horror and filthiness of sin, the thought of having offended a God so good to us, and finally, the thought of having offended a God so good in himself. It is to be observed, that in exciting himself to contrition, although the penitent would do well to delay longest upon whatever motive touches him most, he should always strive to excite himself *by the thought of having offended a God so good in himself*, because this is the most perfect motive of sorrow for sin. It is on this account we say in the act of contrition that we are sorry for our sins, "because Thou art infinitely good and perfect, and most worthy of all my love," &c.

Also the thought of our Saviour having suffered and died for our sins is a very affecting motive of sorrow for sin.

Thirdly, our sorrow for sin should be

supreme, that means that it should be a sorrow above all other sorrow, on which account we say in our act of contrition, that we are *most* heartily sorry for our sins, and that we detest them *above all things*.

Penitent. But, Father, this presents great difficulty to my mind. "A sorrow," you say, "above all other sorrow," how am I to understand this? For example, Father, let me imagine a parent grieving over the remains of a dearly beloved child, or a dutiful child grieving over the remains of a dearly beloved parent, do you mean, Father, that our sorrow for sin should be greater than that?

Confessor. I certainly do; but I shall relieve you by telling you it is of a *totally different kind*.

Penitent. How is that, Father?

Confessor. The sorrow of the parent or of the child, in the case you suppose, is a *natural sorrow*, disturbing the *natural feelings*, and showing itself *outwardly* by those signs or effects which our *natural feelings* produce, when so disturbed. On the other hand, our sorrow for sin is a

supernatural sorrow, conceived, as we have already explained, from *supernatural motives*. These supernatural motives may not at all, or may only in a slight degree, affect our natural feelings; they may produce very little, or none at all, of those outward signs, which are the usual effects of natural sorrow, and at the same time, this does not hinder them from producing in our souls a sorrow for sin above all other sorrow.

Penitent. Then, Father, the difficulty is removed by considering, that our sorrow for sin is of a different kind from the natural sorrow, which we feel on account of natural causes; but, Father, how can we be assured of having this sorrow for sin?

Confessor. In saying it is different from natural sorrow we have said *what it is not*; but to give an idea of *what it is*, we are to consider that it regards two faculties of the soul—namely, the understanding **and the will**. **First, the understanding** considering sin through the light of faith, that is, through the medium of the motives we have already spoken of, regards it as

the greatest of all evils—as the greatest evil man can commit against God—as the greatest evil, the greatest misfortune, the greatest calamity that can possibly befall himself in this world. The understanding regarding sin in this light, presents it in the same light to the will, and the will having been given us by God to pursue what is good, and to turn away from what is evil, according to the representation made to it by the understanding, turns away from sin, that is it detests sin, abhors sin, determines in future to avoid sin more than any other evil, misfortune, or calamity, because the understanding represents it to the will as the greatest of all evils, the greatest of all misfortunes, and the greatest of all calamities. Thus it is, that by the united action of our understanding and our will, aided of course by the divine grace, we have a supreme sorrow for sin, that is, *a sorrow*, as we have said, *above all sorrow*.

But you have asked, how can we be assured that we have that sorrow. There are various signs by which it makes itself known.

First. A person, who is *supremely* sorry for his sins feels convinced, that is, he has not merely a passing thought, a vague idea, but he is *convinced in his inmost soul*, so as to be penetrated with the conviction, that by committing sin he has been guilty of the greatest evil, the greatest calamity, the greatest misfortune he could commit.

Secondly. And, as a consequence of his conviction, he feels determined, not with a wavering or hesitating resolution, but with a resolution as strong as death, to undergo any misfortune or calamity, even death itself in its most terrible form, sooner than again be guilty of mortal sin. Then, if a person can assure himself of having such a conviction and such a resolution regarding sin, he may be well assured of being *supremely* sorry for sin.

In the third place, this *supreme* sorrow makes itself known by its effects. For instance, if I see a penitent making restitution for his past injustices, becoming reconciled with his enemies, tearing himself away from the occasions of sin, and in fine instituting a plan of life, according to which he will in future avoid sin, and

walk steadily and perseveringly in God's holy service—if I see these marks, I at once conclude that “the finger of God is here,” that this is a conversion wrought by the right hand of the Most High.

Penitent. Then, Father, I am to understand, that it is not from the sighs or tears, or other external demonstrations of the penitent you form your judgment, as regards the degree of his sorrow for sin.

Confessor. Of course attention is to be paid to these signs, when they present themselves, and a favorable judgment is to be formed of the penitent. However, the signs to which I have adverted are far more secure, and far less liable to deception. They are also indispensable in every case, whereas sighs, and tears, and other penitential demonstrations depend in most instances upon a soft and sensitive nature, and therefore are not to be expected in a person of a strong and robust habit of mind. Nevertheless, all I have said is not to diminish our admiration of the great examples of penance furnished by sacred history, in whom the vehemence of their supernatural sorrow, imparting

itself to their natural senses produced torrents of tears and continual lamentations for their past guilt. But we are treating of *ordinary* cases, and of how we are to regulate our judgment *generally* in reference to the signs of sorrow which penitents *ordinarily* exhibit.

Penitent. Well, the *fourth* quality of sin you have said, Father, is that it be *universal*.

Confessor. Yes, that means that it should extend to all the mortal sins, of which the penitent is guilty, without excepting a single one.

Penitent. And, Father, that our sorrow should be accompanied with a hope of pardon?

Confessor. Yes, this is the *fifth* quality, and of course, the penitent is to ground this hope upon the boundless goodness and mercy of God, and upon the merits of our Saviour's passion and death, which he is going to have applied to his soul in the sacrament of penance.

Penitent. And the *sixth* and last quality of our sorrow?

Confessor. The *sixth* quality requisite

for our sorrow in approaching the sacrament of penance is *that it be accompanied with a firm purpose of amendment*. This I will say is the great test of true sorrow for sin. Alas! how often have I seen penitents pouring out floods of tears, and yet they would not make up their minds, with a firm purpose, to avoid sin in future. This purpose must be an effective purpose, that is, a purpose which takes in hand *the means* by which it is to be carried out. It is for the penitent and confessor both to see to *these means*, and it is specially for the penitent to yield an unreserved obedience to what the confessor subjoins in reference to them. In cases of *evil habits*, which are to be remedied, and of *occasions of sin*, which are to be broken off, it may be the confessor's strict duty to require severe and painful sacrifices of his penitent; however, our divine Saviour has prepared us for these in saying, "if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it away from thee," &c. And again, "if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it away from thee," &c. From these plain

words of our Saviour we are to understand, that if, in order to avoid being scandalized, or in other words, in order to avoid being led into sin, it were necessary to undergo punishments and sacrifices so great as the privation of our right eye, or our right hand, we must be ready to submit, and our sorrow for sin is wanting in one of its necessary, yes, and I will add, *most* necessary qualities if we refuse this submission. How precious a quality of our sorrow for sin! how many confessions are null and void and sacrilegious because penitents fail in this indispensable quality of their sorrow!

Penitent. Father, how I am indebted to you for your excellent explanation of the qualities of the sorrow requisite for confession. I understand fully the necessity of this sorrow, I hope I also understand, from what I have just heard from you, in what it consists; but, Father, it remains for me to know how I am to excite this sorrow, so as to possess it in going to confession?

Confessor. You have only two things to do; *first*, to pray for it fervently, and

secondly, to reflect earnestly upon the motives of contrition which we have already spoken of—namely, *the fear of hell, the fear of losing heaven, &c. &c.*

Penitent. What do you think of reading over attentively the prayers before confession, as they are to be found in the prayer book?

Confessor. It is an excellent thing to do so. But if you mean to ask, is that sufficient in order to excite in us the requisite sorrow for confession, I cannot answer you at once. I will suppose a penitent who frequently reflects upon the motives of contrition, so that by means of doing so he has *an habitual* sorrow for his sins; I have no doubt but such a penitent, by reading attentively and piously the ordinary prayers before confession, would feel himself excited to sorrow, and sufficiently so, for the requirements of the sacrament of penance. The reason is, because the *habitual sorrow*, continually residing in the soul of such a penitent, by frequent reflection on the motives of contrition, is at once excited when he brings those motives to his mind, by reading the

prayers before confession, just like a fire which is never allowed to die out, and which requires only to be stirred in order to kindle it into a blaze.

If, however, I suppose a penitent who seldom thinks upon the motives of contrition, who, therefore, *has not* his mind habituated to a feeling of sorrow for his sins, I can well imagine such a penitent to read over the prayers before confession, and to read them over, if you will, attentively and piously for the time, *without being, however, effectually moved* to those sentiments of sorrow which the sacrament of penance requires. It is quite true that these sentiments are expressed in the prayers. It is true also that the penitent reading these prayers *sees with his eyes*, and may *express with his lips* these sentiments as they are there worded; but it is too much to say that, by so seeing them, and so expressing them, he has them in his heart in the manner required, and according to the various qualities necessary, as we have seen, for true sorrow.

Penitent. What you say, Father, seems most reasonable, even to the most ordi-

nary understanding. For it is sheer presumption for a man to think, that because he has read over a few prayers, however excellent they may be, he is therefore truly sorry for his sins, that is, sorry internally, sorry supernaturally, in a word, sorry according to the conditions of true sorrow. I mean a man who goes to confession *but seldom*, who thinks seriously of his sins *but seldom*, who has had the motives of contrition *but seldom* in any serious way before his mind.

It seems to me, Father, that this case is quite clear, but that is the very reason I should desire to have from you some practical method of reflecting upon the motives of contrition, in order, with the grace of God, to excite myself to sorrow, not only for this general confession which I am going to make, but for my ordinary confessions afterwards.

Confessor. In order to do so, it will be necessary for us to review each of those motives, one after another, proposing in connection with them some of the more obvious reflections which they suggest. This will be, however, a sufficient subject

for another conference; and, if I can see you to-morrow again, we shall, please God, treat of it at large.

Penitent. By all means, dear Father, I shall be happy to wait on you again and again, for in doing so I shall only be acquitting myself of a duty I owe to my own soul.

Confessor. God bless you. To-morrow again, the same hour.

CONFERENCE VI.

Method of exciting oneself to Contrition before Confession.

Confessor. WELL, sir, our subject to-day is how a person is to reflect upon the motives of contrition, in order to excite himself to sorrow for his sins, before going to confession. Thinking upon this subject, after you had left yesterday, I fancied I should meet your views best by giving you in writing a short meditation upon each of the motives, and I have, accordingly, written out the six medita-

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 101

tions herein contained. You will, however, allow me to observe, in reference to them—

First, That, in using them you will dwell chiefly upon the motive or motives that make most impression upon you, and excite you most to sorrow for your sins.

Secondly, It will not be necessary for you to reflect upon all the motives, each time, that you are preparing for confession.

Thirdly, That you should exercise your mind for each confession on the *fifth motive*, as we noticed in our conversation yesterday.

Penitent. That is, Father, “because of having offended a God *so good in himself*.”

Confessor. Exactly so; or, to express it more fully, “because of having offended a God *infinitely good and infinitely perfect in himself*,” and, therefore, infinitely entitled to be loved with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, and with all our strength, as He himself commands.

Fourthly. You will notice that each of the meditations is divided into three parts, under the following heads, namely: *Reflections, Affections, and Resolutions*.

Fifthly, Each sentence expresses a *distinct reflection*, or a *distinct affection*, or a *distinct resolution*; and you will find the sentences disunited from each other, *in order that you may dwell a sufficient length of time on each*, not merely to look at it, or to recite it with your lips; *but to penetrate your inmost soul*, with the reflection, affection, or sentiment therein contained.

Sixthly, (and this advice is most important to be attended to,) That, before commencing to exercise your mind upon these motives, you would recollect, and place before your mind, the principal sins you have to confess, and, more especially, *any bad habits* or *any occasions of sin*, in which you may happen to be engaged, in order to bring to bear upon such sins, habits, and occasions, your sorrow and purpose of amendment.

Seventhly, That you will estimate your sorrow, not according to the feelings you may have excited within you by the reflections or affections of these meditations, so much as by the firmness of the determination you will form of avoiding sin in future; and you will always count your

sorrow insufficient *until* you feel assured that, with God's grace, you will wage war henceforth against your evil habits, and that you will tear yourself away, at any sacrifice, cost what it will, from all immediate occasions of sin.

With these observations, I place the Meditations in your hands, praying the Almighty to succor you with his grace in using them.

Penitent. Dear Father, what time and pains I have cost you. How I admire your zeal; and it is very little for me to say, that I shall ever regard these Meditations as a precious *souvenir* of your goodness and charity; and, I trust, that God will give me the grace to bring forth, from the use of them, worthy fruits of penance. And, Father, as the writing out of so much matter must have occupied so much of your precious time, I pray you to adjourn this conference to any hour you may find convenient to-morrow.

Confessor. You are so considerate. Well, then, let us fix ten o'clock to-morrow. May God bless you, my good friend; and farewell till to-morrow.

FIRST MEDITATION.—ON HELL.

REFLECTIONS.

IMAGINE thyself, O my soul, taken out of life in the state of mortal sin, and cast into the bottomless pit of hell.

Behold the objects that meet thy view in all directions, the monsters and frightful spectres of the infernal abyss, devils and damned souls, who are to be thy wretched companions throughout all eternity.

And, my soul, these fearful sounds—they are the groans, and shrieks, and cursings, and blasphemings of the damned, which are to resound for ever in thy ears, and in which thou art thyself to join for all eternity.

And this dreadful stench—yes, this is the stench of the noisome pits and caverns all around. It is the stench of the fire and brimstone, of the burning and broiling of the damned.

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 105

And, my soul, thy food in this region of woe shall be no other than the venom of asps and the gall of dragons for ever and ever.

And this devouring fire, in which thou art plunged. Oh! it is that fire which shall never be extinguished, which shall never give thee one moment's rest throughout the countless ages of eternity, in comparison with which all the fire on earth deserves not the name.

O my soul, behold the frightful torments thou hast earned for thyself by sin, and consider what a dreadful thing sin must be, to merit at the hands of God's justice such dreadful punishments.

AFFECTIONS.

O my God, a thousand times thou mightest have damned me if thou wouldst.

If, my God, I were to die in the state I am in at present, I have but too much reason to know that hell is open to receive me, and that the devil has a place prepared for me in these regions of fire.

Oh! what a wretch have I been to be thus rushing headlong into this abyss of woe.

But, my God, I am sorry. Yes, my God, I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for all my sins.

I detest them above all things; and I fly to thee, O God of mercy, for forgiveness and pardon.

Oh! having spared me in the midst of my guilt, thou wilt not turn away thy face of mercy from me, now that I repent of having offended thee.

RESOLUTIONS.

With the dreadful torments of hell before my eyes, what shall I do?

Shall I rush into them by continuing in sin?

Is it for the wretched pleasure of sin I shall damn myself eternally to hell?

Is it for *such a sinful habit* I shall consign myself to everlasting burning?

Is it for *such a companion—such an occasion of sin*—I shall make myself the victim of devouring fire for ever and ever?

• Oh no! my God, my resolution is taken to abandon sin, now and for ever.

Thou, my God, who seest the inmost secrets of my soul, seest that I no longer

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 107

shall be a rebel against thy Divine Majesty.

On the contrary, in proportion as I have offended thee, I am determined to atone with greater earnestness for my transgressions.

I lay these resolutions at thy sacred feet, which I desire from my heart, like Magdalene, to wash with my tears, and I humbly implore thee to confirm them by thy grace.

O Mary, refuge of sinners, pray for me, a poor wretched sinner.

SECOND MEDITATION. ON THE LOSS OF HEAVEN.

REFLECTIONS.

CONSIDER thyself, O my soul, standing before the judgment-seat of Christ, found guilty of mortal sin, and cast away from before the face of your God.

Sin hath robbed thee of heaven, and of the happiness of the blessed, that happiness "which neither eye hath seen, nor

ear hath heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive it."

By sin thou hast deprived thyself of the dignity and delight of abiding for ever in the company of the angels and saints of God in the kingdom of his glory.

On account of sin, thou art deprived of all hope of ever seeing the face of thy God—that face that diffuses joy and happiness among the blessed.

O my soul, how cruel hast thou been to thyself, thus to exchange your right and title to heaven for the base and filthy pleasure of sin.

For heaven wast thou created, for heaven wert thou redeemed, and the ineffable joys of heaven were to be thy portion for ever; but thou hast preferred sin, and thou hast lost heaven, without the slightest ray of hope, through all eternity, of ever regaining it.

AFFECTIONS.

Oh sin! oh sin! how could I have been tempted to commit thee? and how could I have taken pleasure in thee? Oh my soul, wilt thou not henceforth detest that

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 109

dreadful evil which has thus robbed thee of heaven?

Yes, my God, by my sins I have robbed myself of heaven, and it is only through thy divine mercy, that I am allowed to look up with hope to that blessed kingdom.

O, my God, I detest my sins; I detest them with all the earnestness of my soul; I detest them above all things, seeing as I now do, in the light of thy divine grace, how it deprives me of thee, my God, and of the happiness for which thou hast created me.

RESOLUTIONS.

But, my God, not only do I detest sin, but I am resolved henceforth to fly from it, as from the face of a serpent.

Why should I hesitate between sin and heaven; between the filthy and momentary pleasure of sin and the everlasting delights of heaven?

No, my God; look down upon me from thy throne of glory, and witness the resolution I now form of abandoning sin in future.

Yes, my God, cost what it will, I am

determined henceforth, and to my dying hour, to avoid sin, and all occasions of sin, and to do penance for my past sins.

O my God, accept my good purposes, and secure them to thyself by the power of thy divine grace.

O Mary, my advocate in heaven, strengthen by thy prayers, those resolutions, which I present through thee to thy Divine Son.

THIRD MEDITATION.—ON THE HORROR AND FILTHINESS OF SIN.

REFLECTIONS.

CONSIDER, O my soul, the horror and filthiness of sin, in the deformity it produces in the soul of the sinner.

Sin it was that produced that dreadful change in the fallen angels, so that, in a moment, from being the bright images of God, they became hideous monsters and devils. O what a change.

In the same way, O my soul, hath sin

destroyed thy beauty and rendered thee loathsome and abominable.

Before thou hadst sinned, thou wast comely and fair.

Like the angels thou wast the bright and beaming image of God, but by sin thou hast destroyed that beautiful likeness, and now, my soul, what art thou like?

Oh! instead of the image of God, thou art become the image of the devil, hideous, loathsome, and abominable like him, in the sight of God.

By mortal sin, as thou knowest, thou hast inflicted death upon thyself, and thou art become in a manner a filthy carcase, an object of horror before God and his angels.

AFFECTIONS.

Alas, what shall I detest if I detest not sin?

Oh, object of horror and detestation, I abhor and detest thee.

O, my God, that I could wash out with my tears, the tears of repentance, the filth and loathsomeness of sin in my soul.

In the bitterness of my soul I lament having destroyed thy beautiful image within me; and I sigh with a contrite and humble heart to have it restored.

RESOLUTIONS.

Covered with shame and confusion in thy presence, O my God, for having loved sin, for having loved an object so loathsome and disgusting, I now detest it, and in detesting it, there is nothing I shall avoid with greater horror.

O my God, by my repentance I shall endeavor to restore in my poor disfigured soul the traces of thy beauty and thy comeliness.

No, my God, I can bear no longer to carry within me the filthy image of Satan.

O my God, I place my soul once more in thy hands.

Sprinkle it with that Divine Blood, which was shed in order to cleanse it from sin.

And, O Mary, ever spotless and pure, intercede in my behalf, and obtain for me the grace of being washed from my ini-

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 113

quity and cleansed from my sins, in the holy sacrament of penance.

FOURTH MEDITATION.—ON HAVING OFFENDED A GOD SO GOOD TO US.

REFLECTIONS.

My soul, in committing sin thou hast offended a God who hath always been so good to thee.

Without Him thou couldst not continue one instant in existence, for it is in Him thou livest, in Him thou movest, and in him thou hast thy being; and yet thou hast rebelled against Him by committing sin.

Without Him thou shouldst have remained doomed to everlasting perdition, for He it is who hath rescued thee from the mass of perdition; and yet thou hast turned thy back upon him by sin.

All that thou hast, and all that thou art, in the order of nature or the order of grace, hath come from the bounty of that God, whom, notwithstand-

ing; thou hast so often and so grievously offended.

He hath ordained all visible creation to minister unto thy bodily wants—He hath appointed his angels to take care of thee in all thy ways, and stopping at no measure of bounty, mercy, and love, He hath delivered up His own beloved Son to the most cruel and ignominious death, and O my soul, thou hast repaid Him only by sin. O ingratitude! what black and base ingratitude thou hast been guilty of, in offending thy Lord and thy God.

AFFECTIONS.

My God, behold prostrate in thy sight a monster of ingratitude, as I must accuse myself to be, on account of my many and grievous offences against thy divine Majesty.

Every instant of my life, thou hast been heaping thy mercies upon me, so that thou mayest say in my regard, what more could I have done for thee than what I have done; and, O my God, ungrateful wretch that I have been, I have

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 115

turned even thy favors against thee, using them as means of offending thee.

I feel myself, O my God, overwhelmed in thy sight.

I am unworthy to look up to thee, and, therefore, I bow down my guilty head before thy sacred Majesty, craving pardon and mercy.

RESOLUTIONS.

O my God, I shall continue no longer an ungrateful sinner.

I renounce, henceforth, the base ingratitude of which, alas! I have been so guilty toward my best Sovereign and Benefactor.

Thou seest the secrets of my heart, and thou there beholdest my resolution to forsake, at any sacrifice, every thing displeasing to thee.

O my God, my obligations to thee call upon me to abandon, if necessary, all that is near and dear to me in this world; and, behold, I this day promise to thee, in the sight of heaven, that neither pleasures, nor interest, nor friends, nor any other consideration shall ever again

induce me to be ungrateful to your Divine Majesty.

O my God, assist me in my good purposes; and Mary, Mother of God, pray for me.

**FIFTH MEDITATION.—ON HAVING
OFFENDED A GOD SO GOOD IN
HIMSELF.**

REFLECTIONS.

CONSIDER, O my soul, that in committing sin, thou hast offended a God, infinitely good, infinitely perfect, and therefore infinitely deserving of thy love.

The saints and angels of heaven cannot restrain themselves from loving Him with their most ardent love, and thou hast only taken pleasure in offending Him.

To love Him is their happiness and their delight, and thou hast withheld thy affections from Him, and given them to sin.

O my soul, all heaven crieth out to thee, why not love a God of infinite

goodness, a God of infinite perfection, a God who attracts and absorbs, in his divine love, all pure souls in heaven and on earth; and thou, O such hath been thy perverseness, hath turned away from Him and given thy love to sin, which thou hast known to be infinitely hateful in his sight.

AFFECTIONS.

O God, the God of my heart, and my portion for ever.

O my God, and my all.

Oh! too late have I known thee, O Eternal Truth! too late have I loved thee, O Eternal Beauty.

O God of infinite perfection, infinitely lovely, why have I not always loved thee? Why, instead of loving thee, have I offended thee by my numerous and grievous sins?

O sin, I detest thee now, not only because I have deserved hell in committing thee, and robbed myself of all right and title to the kingdom of heaven, but I detest thee, O sin, because in committing thee I have offended a God of in-

finite beauty, a God of infinite perfection, a God infinitely lovely. Sin! I abhor all sin, henceforth and for ever; and I now turn away from all sin, I renounce all, I give my heart and my affections to love my God, with my whole heart, with my whole soul, with my whole mind, and with all my strength.

RESOLUTIONS.

My God! behold me prostrate at thy sacred feet, I wish to bind myself captive to thee in the bonds of love.

I attach myself now and for ever to thee and to thy infinite beauty and perfections, and I take thee to witness that henceforward I shall wage war upon my sinful habits and inclinations.

I shall especially fight against the temptations by which I have hitherto most offended thee, in order that separated from every other love I may love thee alone.

O God of mercy and of goodness, be thou thyself the guardian of my resolutions; and Mary, my Mother, and Mother of my Jesus, help me by thy power-

ful intercession, to persevere in the faithful observance of them.

SIXTH MEDITATION.—ON THE
ENORMITY OF SIN, SHOWN FROM
THE PASSION AND DEATH OF
OUR SAVIOUR.

REFLECTIONS.

Oh! my soul, come and place thyself beneath the cross.

It is thy Saviour and thy God that hangs upon this ignominious gibbet.

And what is it that has merited for him so painful and so disgraceful a death? It is thy sins, alas! thy sins.

He has no sins of his own, for he is the Lamb without spot; but he has clothed himself with thy sins, and behold the state to which they have reduced him.

Ah! yes, beholding him laden with thy sins, the Eternal Father seems to forget who he is; he seems to forget his innocence and sanctity; he seems to forget his own love for this his well-beloved Son.

and regarding only thy sins, which are laid upon him, he discharges upon him all the vengeance of his justice, and exacts from him the sacrifice of his life by this dreadful manner of death.

Ah! my soul, say not that it was the Jews alone that nailed our Saviour to the cross. Turn rather the accusation upon thyself, and upon thy sins.

Yes, my soul, thy sins it was, that wrought this dreadful tragedy, and every wound in that sacred body, from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, cries out to thee, sinner, Behold the enormity of thy guilt! behold the dreadful malice of thy sins, which demanded, at the hands of the divine Justice, such an atonement!

AFFECTIONS.

My God, my God, what shall I say to thee with the sight of my Saviour crucified before my eyes, knowing, as I do, that I am the guilty cause of all he suffers?

Shall I be harder than the rocks that were split asunder—shall I be more insensible than the very earth that trembled—shall I be more dead than the dead

themselves, who came forth from their graves as my Saviour expired upon the ignominious wood—I, for whom, and for whose sins, he bleeds and dies!!

O my Saviour, I cast myself at the foot of thy cross to mingle my tears with thy blood; to unite my sorrow with thy suffering.

RESOLUTIONS.

Infinitely amiable Saviour, seeing what a share my sins have had in thy death, I am resolved to sin no more.

To return to sin should be to crucify thee in a manner over again, and to trample on thy Sacred Blood. Oh, never—never shall I be guilty of such a horrid enormity.

To die rather than offend thee again by mortal sin—behold! O my Jesus, my crucified Jesus, this is my resolution, which at the foot of thy cross I offer and consecrate to thee.

O Mary, who stood by the cross of Jesus as he suffered and died for my sins, obtain of Him the grace which I stand in need of to preserve me from offending Him

by mortal sin for the remainder of my life.

CONFERENCE VII.

Immediate preparation for a General Confession, and manner of making it.

Confessor. WELL, Sir, after all we have said, scarcely any thing requires to be added, on the subject of our repeated conferences. For, if a person have prepared himself well for confession, according to the instructions we have furnished, it is a matter of course that he will make his confession well. On this account, we have very little to say on the manner in which a penitent should proceed in order to make it properly.

Penitent. What you say, Father, is most reasonable; yet, if I should not be taxing too much your zeal and patience, I should desire exceedingly to be conducted—in fact, Father, to be led by the hand, in a manner, through the entire task of making my confession.

Confessor. I admire your earnestness,

and it is quite a pleasure to me to render you all the assistance in my power, in the all-important task you have undertaken.

Penitent. Dear Father, it is your charity that converts trouble into a pleasure.

Confessor. Well, then, we shall commence by recommending certain considerations which it would be well that the penitent would make immediately before confession. *In the first place*, he would do well to consider, that his confessor sits in the holy tribunal of penance, not merely as a man, but as an agent of the most high God, and to exercise a commission entrusted to him by God. When our divine Saviour gave to his Apostles the power of remitting sins, he breathed upon them, imparting to them thereby a new spirit, and what that new spirit was, he declared to them immediately, saying: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," or as he might say in other words, by breathing, as I have done upon you, I communicate to you the Holy Ghost, who is henceforth to reside in you, and through whose power, "whose sins you remit, they are remitted; and whose sins you retain, they are retained."

This power is continued in the Church, and imparted to every clergyman at his ordination, the bishop repeating, on the part of Christ, the same words to the priest which Christ first made use of to the Apostles, "Receive," &c. &c. Consequently we must regard, in the tribunal of penance, not the confessor whom we find there seated, but the divine spirit, the Holy Ghost, the third person of the most Holy Trinity, who resides in the confessor, and acts through his ministry unto the remitting or retaining of our sins.

Penitent. This, Father, is a most solemn consideration, and calculated, in the highest degree, not only to fill the penitent with holy awe, but also to make him open out with the utmost candour all the secrets of his soul to his confessor, considering that he can conceal nothing from the Holy Ghost, to whom he would be guilty of lying by any insincerity in his confession.

Confessor. Just so, and you have stated precisely the practical purpose for which this consideration so well serves. *In the second place*, I would recommend a peni-

tent in approaching confession, to consider, that, after having lost the innocence of our Baptism, our *only* hope of salvation is in the sacrament of penance. This consideration is calculated to determine the penitent to put all the earnestness of his soul into the task of making his confession well, especially if it be a general confession, inasmuch as he has to depend upon it for what may have been wanting in his ordinary confessions.

Penitent. A most serious consideration this, Father, and nothing more true.

Confessor. Well, it is not necessary for me to say what you are to do, when you kneel at confession—how you are to bless yourself, ask the priest's blessing, &c. All this you know; but going to make a general confession there are *three things*, which in the outset you should make known to your confessor: *First*, your age and state of life, and the states of life through which you may have passed up to the present. *Secondly*, your age when confirmed, and when you made your first communion, and how many times since you have not complied with the duty of

Easter communion ; also, how many times you were a whole year without confession, and if you made any bad confessions by concealing sins, or by any other defect. *Thirdly*, what, in a general way, were the leading sins of your life.

Penitent. Yes, Father, I understand, that by putting the confessor in possession of these things, a penitent gives him a general idea of his character, which will serve to throw light upon the details afterward.

Confessor. Yes, that is the object in view. Then it is of the utmost consequence to proceed orderly through the confession, on which account I would suggest the following arrangement as calculated to insure order. *First*, to combine under one head all that belongs to the First and Third Commandments of God, and the First Commandment of the Church. The matters appertaining to these Commandments having some connection with each other, they mutually explain each other, on which account it would be well, for order and clearness, to keep them together. *Secondly*, I would recommend,

for the same reason, to combine under one head, the sins against the Second and Fifth Commandments of God, as also the vice of drunkenness, because cursing and swearing, fighting and quarrelling, &c., are found generally to be kindred vices. *Thirdly*, the Sixth and Ninth Commandments are obviously not to be separated. After these combinations the penitent has only to take up the Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth of the Commandments of God, the Second, Fifth, and Sixth Precepts of the Church, the Third and Fourth having been accounted for among the things explained in the outset of the confession. Then he proceeds to the Seven Capital Sins, of which covetousness, luxury, anger, may be combined with the Seventh, Sixth, and Fifth of the Commandments of God respectively.

Penitent. This plan would simplify the confession greatly, and prevent the repetition of matters already explained. What would you think, Father, of dividing one's life into a certain number of periods, for example, making the first period from the use of reason up to sixteen years of age,

the second from sixteen up to the time of getting married, or of taking a fixed position in life, and the third period from thence to the present.

Confessor. Such a plan has its advantages and its disadvantages; and I consider the advantages of it can be sufficiently attained by the three statements which I have already recommended to be made at the outset of the confession, and also by following each sin in its progress according as it may have persevered as a habit, or occurred occasionally, throughout one's past life up to the present time. And I consider by so doing the disadvantages of needless repetition, and of much complication and confusion would be avoided, which are the disadvantages of the plan you have mentioned. And as we have been led insensibly to such length into this subject, it just strikes me that I would best aid you, if I were to sketch for you an imaginary example of a general confession, in which you would see exemplified, and carried into effect, the various observations we have made

on the examen of conscience, and the manner of proceeding at confession.

Penitent. O Father, that would be so satisfactory, leaving room for no mistake in the application of the various instructions you have laid down.

Confessor. Well, then, as you think so well of it, I shall prepare the proposed example for to-morrow, and that I may have the more time, you will, I trust, be satisfied if we close our conference for to-day forthwith.

Penitent. By all means, Father, and I thank you again and again for all your charity and zeal. The same hour I suppose?

Confessor. Yes, sir, the same hour. God bless you, my friend; God bless you!

CONFERENCE VIII.

Imaginary example of a General Confession.

Confessor. WELL, sir, I have endeavored, as we agreed upon yesterday, to sketch out an example of a general

confession, in order to show in what manner the various instructions we have already given are to be carried into practical effect. However, there are two observations which I desire to make, and which you would do well to keep in view in using this example. *In the first place*, this example is not in any way designed to serve as a substitute for an examination of conscience, and, therefore, it omits several sins usually found in the examens of conscience, as given in the prayer books. *In the second place*, I have thought it better, for the end in view in this example, to change, in reference to the Sixth and Ninth Commandments, the plan pursued with regard to the other Commandments, and I trust you will find the special explanations I shall give you relative to these two commandments quite sufficient.

I regret, being particularly occupied to-day; I cannot remain with you longer.

Penitent. Father, let me not trespass one moment on your precious time. I know the many demands upon your zeal.

Pray appoint any time at your convenience.

Confessor. You are so considerate. Well, one o'clock to-morrow.

Penitent. Very well, Father, and believe me to be ever grateful. Your blessing, Father.

Confessor. God bless you. One o'clock, please God, to-morrow.

IMAGINARY EXAMPLE OF A GENERAL CONFESSION.

Father, I am forty-five years of age; my occupation is that of a merchant; I spent my youth, up to twelve years of age, at home with my parents, and from that to seventeen at college. I then lived at home with my parents for two years, at the end of which I was put to business. After five years apprenticeship, I did business for another merchant for four years, and then commenced business on my own account. Very soon afterwards I got married, being about twenty-nine years of age; my wife is dead since three years; I have got a family of four children.

I made my first communion at the age

of eleven, and was confirmed two years earlier; I have to accuse myself, of neglecting my Easter duty *five Easters* since my first communion, and I was without confession a whole year, *three times*, since I began to go to confession.

I am sorry also to have to mention, that, through false shame, in the early part of my life, I willingly concealed sins in confession, and made *three* confessions afterwards, and *three* communions, before I confessed these sins; when I confessed them, Father, I made over again the confessions in which I had concealed them.

My *leading sins*, during my past life, arose from a very bad temper, and from a habit of intoxication which I had for *six* years; such, Father, is the general outline of my life.

Entering into details, Father, I have prepared myself to mention, in the first place, all the sins I could recollect relating to the First and Third Commandments of God, and the Second Commandment of the Church; because, Father, these sins seem connected in some manner with each other.

Accordingly, under the head of the First Commandment, as regards faith, I accuse myself of denying, *twice*, in particular circumstances, that I was a Catholic; I assisted in or about *seven times* at acts of religion performed by clergymen of other religious creeds; I assisted also at family prayers with persons of a different religion *in or about a dozen of times*.

In reference to the virtue of hope, Father, I don't recollect having transgressed against it by despairing at any time in God's mercy; but Father, I have to accuse myself of presumption, by delaying my repentance *several times* after falling into mortal sin; the extent of my guilt in this respect you will see, Father, in the details of my confession.

As to charity, I accuse myself, in the first place, of transgressing against charity toward God, by the several mortal sins, which I have committed during my life, and which I desire now to confess; and, as to the charity due to my neighbor, I fear I have sinned against it very much.

To give you a knowledge of my guilt in this particular, you know, Father, as I

have mentioned, that I am a merchant in considerable business; my contributions towards purposes of charity, in various ways, might be about £30 a-year; so far as that amount may have been insufficient, according to my means, I accuse myself; moreover I remember *six or seven instances* of particular distress in which I refused relief, though my conscience reproached me very much at the time. The further faults I have to mention against charity due to my neighbor I shall reserve for the Fifth Commandment.

As to prayer, although I had the habit of saying my prayers morning and evening, throughout my life, I must accuse myself of *frequent omissions* of them, particularly of my morning prayers, and of saying them very often with much rapidity, negligence, and distraction.

I have taken notice of dreams sometimes, and of omens, but it was only in a passing way, and without laying any great stress upon them. I joined also sometimes superstitious practices, such as young people amuse themselves with on All Saints' Eve, but I have done

some of them like others, out of amusement.

I have further to accuse myself, under this Commandment, of having been very rude *on two occasions* to a clergyman, and I spoke in presence of several persons, *four or five times*, in a very disrespectful way of him.

Under the Third Commandment of God, and the Second Commandment of the Church, I accuse myself of having omitted mass, at an average, *in or about five times a year*, through my own fault. Likewise my habit through life, until about *five or six years ago*, was merely to hear mass on Sundays and holidays, without doing any more to sanctify these days. I was, moreover, frequently very much distracted during mass; and, perhaps, I might accuse myself of having several times assisted at mass, or a considerable part of it so negligently, as if I were not at mass at all. This was in my youth, and likely *in or about ten times a year for seven years*.

I accuse myself of doing servile work, without necessity, for a considerable portion of the Sunday, and more frequently

of holidays I might say, *in or about fifty times* in my life. I have also *likely as often*, made others, such as servants, and perhaps *two or three* at a time, work unnecessarily for a considerable time on Sundays and holidays. I was in fault *in or about twenty times* for others having lost mass, by keeping them from mass without sufficient cause, or by not requiring servants, or others under my charge, to go to mass. I accuse myself, moreover, of having neglected *generally, through life*, to see that those under my charge sanctified the Sundays and holidays by doing something else beyond merely assisting at mass on these days.

I shall now proceed, Father, to the Second Commandment, combining with it the sins against the Fifth, and the vice of drunkenness. You recollect, Father, that I stated in the commencement, that my *leading failings* through life were a bad temper; and, for *six or seven years*, a habit of intoxication.

In reference, then, to the Second Commandment, I hope I have always told the truth, whenever I was called upon in a

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 137

cause of justice to take an oath ; but what afflicts me, Father, concerning oaths, is the rash and profane manner I used, through life, to take the name of God when my bad temper would get the better of me. I used to give way to this kind of temper, I will say *once a fortnight*, at an average, from childhood till *about ten years ago*, since which period up to the present, I have been in a violent passion *not more than eight or ten times*. In these outbreaks of temper, I had the habit of saying "By God," sometimes, "By Jesus;" and sometimes, but rarely, "By the Holy Ghost." Perhaps, in every fit of passion, one or other of these expressions would escape me *three or four times*. I had the habit also, upon these occasions, of imprecations, such as "God damn you," "Go to hell," and such like, perhaps *three or four times* in the same fits of passion. The same expressions of cursing and swearing were also habitual to me when intoxicated, which used to happen so as to have my reason disturbed very much, that is, that I could recollect myself only imperfectly next day, perhaps *twenty-five times a year*

during six, or from six to seven years; and I remember that *five times* I was drunk to a degree that I lost power of myself.

Besides cursing and swearing, as I have mentioned, I remember having cursed a person from my heart, wishing him, and all belonging to him, all kinds of misfortune, in consequence of a difference between him and me, and I had rancour in mind for him, *for three or four months*, during which, *in or about twice a week*, I have cursed him in the manner I have mentioned.

As to fighting and quarrelling, I remember I had blows, in my youth, with young people like myself in a serious way, *in or about twenty times*; and since I grew up, as well as I recollect, *five times*. I kept hatred very bitterly in my mind against *three persons* in my life, for *two or three months* for each, one with another, and I had the intention of being revenged *on one of them*, so far as to do him serious injury in any way that I would find an opportunity. I had this bad intention for *nigh three months* in my mind. I have had a dispute with a brother of mine some

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 189

months ago, on account of which we are not on speaking terms since.

As to the sin of scandal, Father, you understand that I gave scandal or bad example in all these outward sins I have confessed, and have still to confess, such as anger, cursing and swearing, drunkenness, &c.; and I must leave it to yourself, Father, to estimate the amount of my bad example, from the extent of my guilt in reference to these outward sins.

I shall now proceed to the Fourth Commandment, and to accuse myself in reference to my parents, my wife, my children, and my servants. As regards my parents, I accuse myself of having, in various ways, displeased them during my youth, by levity of conduct, improper manner toward them, and by doing various things that were displeasing to them. Besides this I have to accuse myself, in particular, of using very disrespectful language, *in or about twenty times*, toward my father, and *about ten times* toward my mother, so as to make her cry on account of it. I also obstinately disobeyed one or the other *in or about a*

dozen of times, so as to cause them great pain by my disobedience, on these occasions. I have further to mention that I got married contrary to their wishes, and caused them great pain thereby *for six or seven weeks* before, and perhaps *the same time after*, marriage. I accuse myself, moreover, that I was wanting in my duty toward my mother in not coming to her aid towards the end of her life, *for about three years*, that she was very poorly circumstanced, and I could have relieved her; she felt very much my neglect of her, and I feel I was greatly to blame for it.

As regards my children, they were witnesses of my bad temper, which I have already mentioned, and the objects of these curses and imprecations, which I was so much in the habit of. I chastised one of them in a great fit of rage, and with great cruelty *once*. I sent one of them *for a year* to a Protestant school. I allowed one of them to keep company constantly *for a year* with persons of bad morals. I allowed one of them to have a book which I had reason to consider dangerous to his virtue *for about six months*.

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 141

As to my wife, you will understand, Father, how much my temper and habits of drinking must have made her unhappy. Besides that, I accuse myself of being very harsh to her *about a dozen of times*, so as to cause her to cry and feel very unhappy for a few days.

I made my servants also feel the annoyance of my bad temper. I moreover recollect, *about ten times*, to have treated two of them with great harshness. Through my fault, also, it occurred in some instances, *eight or nine times*, as well as I remember, that my servants did not attend to their Easter duty; also they lost mass through my fault altogether *in about twenty instances*.

In reference to my master, during my apprenticeship, and my other master, for whom I did business for four years afterward, I was guilty of grievous disrespect toward the first about *fourteen or fifteen times*, and toward the second *about seven or eight times*. I also sinned against the fidelity I owed them, by permitting property of theirs, for which I was concerned, to go to loss, and some of it to be taken

away dishonestly by persons in the same employment with me. I do not recollect any considerable amount, at any one time, but the amount of property gone to loss, through my fault and neglect, might be £5 worth on my first master, and about £3 on my second master. Also what I permitted to be taken dishonestly might be about £7 from the former, and the same from the latter.

What I have to say of my own dishonesty I will reserve for the Seventh Commandment, which I desire to proceed to next in order.

Under this Commandment I accuse myself, in the first place, of having taken from my father when I lived at home, in my youth, the sum of £1 *in one particular instance*; and of taking *different small sums*, such as sixpence now, and a shilling again. It was not a habit exactly, but happened occasionally, and perhaps the total I took in this way might not exceed *thirty shillings*. I also gave things away belonging to my father's property in the same manner, *sixpence worth now, and a shilling's worth then*, and in all, perhaps a

couple of pounds worth, till I left home. Afterward, during my apprenticeship, I was guilty of dishonesty towards my employer in taking, in the commencement, *a few pence occasionally*, without, however, any habit to that effect, and perhaps to the amount of *eight or ten shillings*. Some time afterward, I fell into a regular habit of taking something; perhaps it might be, in the average, *1s. 1d. a week for so long as nine months*, when I desisted. Again, after some time, I took *thirty shillings* in one sum. With the person for whom I did business before I commenced on my own account, I was guilty of dishonesty, I think, to the amount of *ten shillings* at one time, and of *fifteen* another, by turning to my own account and benefit certain articles of property belonging to him.

Since I commenced business on my own account, I hope I have nothing of this sort to accuse myself of, except in a matter of dealing, in which I wronged a person by giving a damaged article for sound, to the amount of thirty shillings.

I have made restitution for all these in-

justices at different times, when I confessed them before.

Next, Father, I accuse myself against the Eighth Commandment, of frequently speaking to the disadvantage of my neighbor's character; but I recollect *three instances* particularly, which were very culpable. In one of these I made known to several persons *at the same time* perhaps *to nine or ten*, and *at different times to as many more, one by one*, a disgraceful matter respecting a neighbor. This matter was true; in the *other two cases*, I told a similar matter of other neighbors, upon very slender grounds, and it turned out to be untrue. There was but *one* character concerned each time, and the number of persons to whom I told the matter, might be *four* in one case, *they being all together*; and *seven* in the other, *at different times to each*.

Now, Father, we will proceed to the Commandments of the Church, or to such of them as I have not already included in my confession, so far.

As to fasting and abstinence, I must accuse myself of having made very little

difference, as to the quantity of food I used on fast days up to the time of my marriage; after which I began to be strict, and regulated myself, in that respect, according to the instructions of my confessor.

As to the kind of food forbidden, I accuse myself of eating meat *four times* on forbidden days, and of having given scandal by doing so in presence of *four or five persons* each time. I also took butter for breakfast about *twenty times* in my life, and eggs *about six times* contrary to the rules of fasting.

I have already accused myself of the Third and Fourth Precepts of the Church.

I have nothing to say of the Fifth, having contributed, according to my means, always to the support of the clergy; and, in reference to the Sixth, every thing relating to my marriage was according to the law of the Church.

As to the seven capital sins, I have considered covetousness under the head of the Seventh Commandment, and, likewise, luxury and anger, under the heads, respectively, of the Sixth and Fifth: I

will, then, proceed to the remainder of these sins.

In reference to pride, I was guilty of mortal sin *once* in order to avoid a humiliation. I also committed mortal sin *once*, in order to attain some purpose of ambition. In several other ways I was guilty of pride in speaking of myself, in delighting in hearing myself praised, and thinking favorably of myself. I was guilty more or less through life of pride and vanity in dress, and in making up my appearance and general manner.

As to gluttony, I have already accused myself of my habit of drinking for some time; I have to add, having eaten to excess *about ten times*, so as to be sick afterward. I was, moreover, very often guilty of slight excesses and intemperance in eating and drinking.

I had, during my life, frequent temptations of envy, and often did not reject them; but I remember having a settled, and a very deep feeling of that sort toward a person who had obtained a certain promotion which I was a candidate for with him. This feeling remained *for*

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 147

three months, and often I wished him any misfortune that would deprive him of the situation.

I accuse myself, as regards sloth, of that degree of neglect respecting my spiritual interests which you can best judge of from the confession I have made. In particular, however, I accuse myself of having stopped in bed *three times*, so as to lose mass on Sundays by that means.

As to the duties of my state of life, I have nothing to say that is not already explained in my confession.

This, Father, is my confession; and for these sins, and all others, which I cannot bring to memory, I humbly beg pardon of God, and penance and absolution of you, Father.

CONFERENCE IX.

Special observations on sins omitted in the foregoing example.

Confessor. I FIND I can give you but very few minutes to-day, but enough, I

hope, to give you the explanations I promised upon the Commandments I omitted in the imaginary example.

Penitent. I request you will not allow me to occupy you a single moment, beyond what is perfectly convenient to you.

Confessor. Thank you. Well, then, I omitted the Sixth and Ninth Commandments, hoping that the explanations I should give you in reference to them would be more satisfactory.

I desire, then, to explain, in the first place, that not only acts, but *thoughts, desires, and feelings* contrary to these Commandments, are *mortal sins* when entertained with pleasure and deliberate consent of the mind.

Penitent. But, Father, if a person had no intention of committing the sinful act or deed to which such thoughts, desires, or feelings related?

Confessor. Even so, they are always mortal sins, when, as I have said, they are entertained with pleasure, and deliberately consented to.

Penitent. Alas! Father, I am afraid

there are many bad confessions on that account.

Confessor. It is just for that reason that I wish to leave no doubt about the matter. You have heard, I am sure often, the words of holy Job: "I have made a covenant with my eyes *that I should not think of a virgin.*" See the care the holy man took of his eyes in order to prevent immodest thoughts reaching his mind. Oh! that all Christians were equally on their guard. Again, what does our Saviour say in the Gospel? His words are: "You have heard it was said of them of old, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say to you, whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her *in his heart.*" Thus, it is, that the holy virtue of purity can be blasted, and is daily blasted, *even in the mind and heart, by bad thoughts, feelings, and desires,* which, therefore, are necessary to be mentioned in confession.

Penitent. Dear Father, how important this explanation!

Confessor. The second matter I wish

to explain is, that, if a person should have any sinful acts contrary to these commandments to confess, he should confess such acts, *in the first place*, reserving thoughts, desires, &c., to be confessed afterward. The reason is, that acts of this sort help to explain such thoughts, desires, &c., by being first mentioned.

In the third place, I wish to remind you of what I already told you, that in the matters relating to these commandments, particular attention is to be paid to *the specific distinction of sins*. The reason is, because many sins against these commandments are similar to each other, and are liable, therefore, to be confounded in confession, whereas they are specifically distinct. On this account, the penitent is to take care to distinguish sins of a different kind from each other in his confession. The chief circumstances causing a difference in the sins forbidden by these commandments are, not only the difference in the acts in which such sins consist, but also *the particular personal condition* of the penitent, or of the person, involved in his guilt, according as they may, for ex-

ample, be married or unmarried, related or not related, &c. &c.

Penitent. I am to understand, Father, that these circumstances not only aggravate the sins in question, but also change their nature, or impart to them additional guilt of a special and different kind.

Confessor. Just so; and it is on this account that not only the difference of the sinful acts or deeds, but also *the different circumstances* are to be carefully attended to in reference to these commandments.

Penitent. These explanations, Father, are exceedingly important; and I now see your reason for treating these commandments apart from the others, and in a different manner.

Confessor. I will only add, that a penitent is to resolve not to permit false shame, or any such feeling, to restrain him from the *full and undisguised* confession of whatever his conscience accuses him, with respect to these sins.

Penitent. Alas, Father, what a misfortune! By doing so he should be only entertaining a cancer in his own soul, to be to him an incessant and burning tor-

ture; and should he part this life in such a state, his unhappy destiny should be, that for his shame in the secret tribunal of confession, and with a single individual—his confessor—who is bound to an everlasting secrecy, and who, by his office, so far from being shocked at what his penitent has to disclose, is accustomed to hear constantly the declaration of such sins,—for this shame, so unwarranted and so unreasonable, he shall be put to shame on the last day, and have the same sins published to all mankind, and even to the angels of heaven and the devils of hell, for his eternal shame, confusion, and horror.

Confessor. I regret I must take leave of you for to-day, but I hope I shall be able to afford you more time to-morrow.

Penitent. Thank you, Father—what hour?

Confessor. Would you say eleven?

Penitent. Your convenience, Father.

Confessor. Very well, eleven—farewell.

CONFERENCE X.

Means of Perseverance.

Confessor. EXPECTING the pleasure of seeing you to-day, I have been thinking what should be the subject of our conference. I find we have gone through the whole process of a general confession, so as to have completely exhausted the subject. At all events, nothing remains to be said upon it which may not be supplied from the general instructions on the sacrament of penance, which are to be found in the prayer books and special treatises on that sacrament. It has, however, occurred to me that we might occupy ourselves very profitably for one conference more, in considering the means of perseverance in grace, as also an outline of a rule of life for this end, and while such a subject so naturally accords with the general subject of our repeated conferences, it will form a suitable termination of them.

Penitent. Dear Father, could any thing be more important? You said, at an

early period of your valuable instructions. that a person should undertake a general confession with the firm purpose of never again returning to sin; on the contrary, he should be resolved to lead thenceforth a truly Christian life. On this account, how important is it to know by what means this holy purpose is to be carried into effect, and perseveringly maintained! Moreover, I recollect our divine Saviour's words, that it is only he that will have persevered to the end that shall be saved.

Confessor. I am delighted that you comprehend the full importance of the subject, and we shall proceed to it, therefore, without delay.

The first means of perseverance is to preserve in the soul an undying spirit of compunction and sorrow for our past sins. The Holy Ghost in the book of Ecclesiasticus, (ch. v. 5,) requires of us not to be without fear for sin forgiven.

Penitent. This is most reasonable, Father; for if we continue to be sorry for any thing we have done, we are not inclined to do that thing again. But, Father, how are we to keep up that undy-

ing feeling of sorrow in our souls for our past sins?

Confessor. I am very glad you ask me that question, for it is a most practical one. First, then, we preserve this sorrow by continually reminding ourselves of our past sins. Holy David, though assured by the prophet that his sin was forgiven him, could, notwithstanding, never lose sight of it: "I know my iniquity," he used to say, "and my sin is before me." My sin is before me, so that it is like an object opposite to me, whithersoever I turn. King Ezechias also, as it is mentioned of him in the book of Isaias, chap. xxxviii. 15, promised to the Almighty, that he would constantly "recount to him all his years in the bitterness of his soul."

Secondly, in order to preserve a constant sense of sorrow in the soul for past sin, I would recommend the constant practice of penance. This is recommended to us by all the great models of penance. Notwithstanding his assurance of being pardoned, David never interrupted his habit of doing penance, clothing himself with sackcloth, mixing ashes with

his drink, and constantly crying out to heaven for mercy. St. Paul, also, (what an example!) he continually chastised his body, to bring it under subjection. However, for fear of any excess or imprudence, a penitent would do well to take the advice of his confessor, as to any voluntary practices of penance he would undertake.

Penitent. Then, Father, your first advice is, that in order to persevere in grace, a person should preserve in his soul an undying sorrow for sin, and he should do this chiefly by renewing constantly the recollection of his sins, and by persevering in the practice of doing some penance for them. Well, Father, what would be the next means that you would recommend?

Confessor. The second means I would recommend, is to fly the *immediate* occasions of sin.

Penitent. Yes, Father, I have often heard great stress laid upon this, and I am most anxious to learn from you accurately what these occasions are.

Confessor. Well, then, by the *immediate* occasions of sin, you will under-

stand such persons, such places, and such things, as present either *of themselves*, or *on account of the special weakness of a particular individual*, a grievous temptation to mortal sin, that is, such a temptation as he would in all likelihood yield to, should he expose himself to it. You perceive, therefore, that these occasions are twofold, *some* which are so of their own nature, and *others*, which are so only in virtue of the special frailty of a particular individual, and which, from experience, he himself knows, and his confessor points out to him.

Penitent. I see the distinction, Father, but I would wish you, if you please, to go into detail, and point out the examples of *persons, places, and things*, that are to be avoided, as being the *immediate* occasions of sin.

Confessor. Very well, let us begin with *persons*. First, there are persons who are in the habit of *using improper language*, language which clearly betrays a corrupt heart. Beware of such persons; intimate acquaintance and familiarity with them

is sure to be to you an immediate occasion of sin.

Penitent. But, Father, there are persons of this sort, who, in other respects, are very amiable, and have several good points. Might not a person, then, cultivate their friendship and associate with them, in order to turn them from their evil ways and change them to virtue?

Confessor. My friend, this would be a serious delusion. Alas! on account of the evil bent of nature, it is easier to incline people to vice than to virtue, and you would have less chance to win such people to God, than they would have to win you to the devil; moreover, what you say of their amiability and good points, is quite a mistake. All this is but a stratagem, which the Devil uses to bring innocent souls within the corrupting influence of the people in question. We must never forget the words of the Holy Ghost, that "evil conversations corrupt good morals." 2 Cor. chap. xv. ver. 33.

Penitent. Any other persons, Father, that are to be avoided, as furnishing an immediate occasion of sin?

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 159

Confessor. Yes, in the second place, you know *a person who is addicted to improper habits of life* though he may be reserved and correct in his language. Avoid that person. "With the perverse," says the Spirit of God, "thou shalt be perverted." Psalm xvii. 27.

In the third place, there is a person *with whom, and through whom, you have sinned*; avoid that person in particular; avoid him *at any sacrifice or inconvenience*, even though he be *as precious to you as your right eye, or as valuable to you as your right hand*: you must be aware of him, according to the express injunction of our divine Saviour.

Penitent. But, Father, in the passage you allude to, our Saviour speaks of scandal, or a person from whom one receives scandal.

Confessor. Just so; that is, one with whom, and through whom, you commit sin; for this is the proper meaning of scandal.

In the fourth place, there are *two persons of different sex*, moral and well-conducted, if you will; aye, virtuous and

pious, *who meet alone and seek each other's company in private*—I say of them, that if they do not desist from such private meetings, even though they be living saints, they shall surely make devils of each other. “The more holy they are,” says St. Augustine, “the more tempting are they to each other.”

Penitent. Father, I understand now, what I often heard, that evil company is such a rock of scandal.

Confessor. Well, I said there are *places* to be avoided, as being also immediate occasions of sin.

First of all, I would instance the gambling-house, the public-house, and the dancing-house; and, in a word, those places which are to be found in towns and villages, and often in mere rural districts—places, I say, where young persons meet together for light pleasure and amusement. Such places are schools of the devil, where youth is trained into sin and vice.

Penitent. Would you include *the theatre* in these places?

Confessor. Most certainly I would.

Penitent. But, Father, there is a diversity of opinion, as well as I understand, on the subject.

Confessor. I rather think you are under a misconception. There may be different modes adopted by different confessors in dealing with the case, as it is met in the practice of the ministry. This, however, is true, not only in reference to this matter, but other matters also, and the difference consists more in *the manner* of different persons, according as they may be more mild or more austere, than in any difference of view or opinion upon *the matter* in question. Also, attention must be paid to the circumstances under which persons sometimes go, or rather are brought, to such places; and a distinction is to be taken, moreover, between persons who have gone only *once or twice*, and persons in *the habit* of going, and *who have acquired a propensity and passion* for these places.

Penitent. I see, Father, these various considerations may account, or more truly, do indeed account, for what I have heard of the varying opinions of clergymen,

upon the subject of frequenting the theatre.

Confessor. Believe me, there is no difference of opinion among us on the subject. We all have the same moral works in our hands to guide us on moral subjects, and the authors of Catholic moral theology are unanimous in condemning the frequentation of theatres as a practice fatal to the virtue of young people. Moreover, my excellent friend, if we had no other test of this matter, it should be sufficient to look to the habits of those who lead Christian lives in our towns and cities. Of themselves they refrain from such places; and if, perchance, one of that class were seen there, it should not fail to be a subject of observation and severe comment, which shows, that even abstracting from all authoritative teaching on the matter, virtue itself instinctively shudders at going to these places.

Penitent. I feel this is a more serious subject than I ever regarded it; and from the experience of my younger days, I have reason to remember, that not only what

is seen and heard in the place itself, so calculated as it is to excite corrupt passion, but the late hours, the companions to be met, the accidents on the way going and returning, and the dissipation of mind—all tend to undermine the best purposes, and expose the best disposed Christians to serious danger.

Confessor. Yes, and you will observe, that the dangers which are here to be dreaded, regard the holy virtue of purity; which, however, "we all have in earthen vessels." 2 Cor. iv. 7. "That every one, therefore, may know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of desire," our only sure means is, to avoid all dangerous occasions. "Fly from them," says St. Augustine, "if you wish to obtain the victory." Serm. 350, de Temp.

Penitent. Is there *any other place* that should be avoided?

Confessor. In addressing people in the country, as it is sometimes my lot, I always caution them against wakes, in those districts where measures are not in use to control wake-house abuses.

Penitent. What a revolting anomaly is this! Death is present; its work of sorrow is before their eyes; yet people will not be deterred from excesses of language and conduct mortally offensive to the Almighty.

Confessor. Well, having spoken of persons and places, let us proceed to *things*.

Penitent. Yes, Father, I should be so glad to hear *what things* I am to avoid, as being immediate occasions of sin.

Confessor. In the first place, I shall instance *bad books* and *bad compositions* of every kind, and also, for the same reason, *improper pictures*. Alas! what a deluge of immorality is poured in upon the world from this source!

Penitent. Father, by bad books and other compositions, you mean, of course, those that offend against the doctrines and practices of religion, as also against the purity of Christian morality?

Confessor. Yes, and it is to be observed, that the most dangerous books are not those that disclose openly the venom they contain, but those *that disguise* it. If we could see the serpent, we would avoid his

bite; but it is the serpent that hides himself in the grass that is most to be dreaded.

Penitent. I would like, Father, to hear your opinion *on novels*.

Confessor. Why, there are novels of different kinds, good and bad, innocent and dangerous; and what I say of other books, applies in a great degree to novels.

I should by no means be warranted in preventing the reading of a book, merely because it is a novel. A novel, what is it? It is a work of fiction or imagination. To read such works *occasionally*, if they contain nothing contrary to religious truth or morals, may be, for the time, an innocent amusement; it may even be improving to taste. There is, however, danger of contracting *a passion for this kind of reading*, and the consequence of such a passion should be, as experience shows, that the person contracting it would cease to be governed by good sense and sober judgment, and would become the dupe of imagination and folly. After this, there is no taste for pious reading or serious reflection; and for want of this strengthening aliment, the mind becomes enervated

into a frivolous habit of thinking, and falls, too often, a ready prey to the illusions of the devil. I will only add, that of all kinds of bad books, *the most dangerous are bad novels*, and that bad novels do often so artfully conceal their corrupting influence, that the mind of the reader is sometimes depraved, without almost his having observed the process of corruption he has undergone.

Penitent. I am sure also, Father, that among *the things* to be avoided, you would include *idleness, and all excess in eating and drinking.*

Confessor. Assuredly; if we cast oil upon the fire, what can we expect but that it will blaze up? In like manner, these excesses are sure to light up the flame of corrupt passion in our mortal members. And to despatch this subject of immediate occasions, I shall conclude with saying, first, that occasions of sin, which are so to some, may not be so to others; and of all occasions, there is none so necessary to be avoided, *as that which a person has experienced to have led him into sin*; secondly, the instances of occasions, which

I have adduced are not to be taken as comprising all the occasions, which we are bound to avoid; they are *instances*, merely, of the several kinds of occasions, and designed to furnish a practical idea of what occasions, in their general import, mean; they will serve also to detect other cases of occasion, as they may occur. Finally, I shall observe, that *in the resolution of amendment* which is required to accompany sorrow for sin, it is specially necessary to direct this resolution *to the steps that are to be taken*, in order to break off any occasion, to which a penitent may be exposed.

Penitent. Before we leave this subject of immediate occasions, the importance of which, I must say, I never before understood, you will permit me to observe that, if I were some five and twenty years back upon my life, all you have said would seem to impose a great restraint upon the amusements of youth.

Confessor. Pardon me, Sir; the instances of amusements which I have adduced are but few, and leave still a large and varied scope for innocent relaxation.

No person can understand better than I do, the necessity of innocent and lawful pleasures for young persons, but the limit must be fixed, and the line pointed out beyond which amusements begin to be criminal and offensive to Almighty God. I would even ask yourself, in reference to your own children, if I have prohibited any thing that you would not forbid to them, desiring, as you do, to bring them up in the fear and love of God?

Penitent. Quite true, Father; when the responsibility is brought home to a person in that way, and especially when the case is varied from one's self, it is easy to see the matter in its proper light; but the buoyancy and impetuosity of youth is so liable to launch into excesses.

Confessor. St. Peter Chrysologus speaking on this subject which has engaged us so long, made use of the famous saying: "That he who desires to joke with the devil, cannot rejoice with Christ."

Penitent. I often heard, that *family amusements*, and the relaxations and enjoyments of family society, that is, of friends and relations in the interchanges

of hospitality among each other, is the safest, and, in all respects, the best mode of providing for the buoyancy and gaiety of youth.

Confessor. Nothing more true; and to make home happy is a great secret in the good rearing of children.

But to proceed: the next means I would lay down for persevering in virtue, is *the frequent use of the Sacraments of Penance and of the Blessed Eucharist*. These sacraments have been instituted for the more ordinary use of Christians; and as delicate persons require two things for their corporal health, namely, medicine and wholesome food, so do we require for the health of our soul the same two things. Now, the Sacrament of Penance is to us an unfailing medicine for all the maladies of our souls; and the Blessed Eucharist is a heavenly nourishment, which aids us and fortifies us, on our journey to the eternal banquet of the just in heaven.

Penitent. How often then would you say that a person ought to approach these sacraments?

Confessor. With the view of persever-

ing in the grace and friendship of God (for this is the question here) I would say once a month; and this rule I would lay down, not only from my own experience, but from the experience of every other director of souls, with whom I have ever spoken upon the matter, especially for young people and for persons prone to temptation, whatever be their age.

Penitent. But, Father, you know this is impossible.

Confessor. I am quite aware that, in many cases, it is so, and then I should hope that God, in his mercy, would take other channels to furnish his preserving graces. But, lest you should extend your idea of this impossibility too widely, from what causes, may I ask you, does it arise?

Penitent. O Father, only imagine all the world going once a month to confession. Where would they find confessors?

Confessor. Gently, my good friend. You did well to say, "*only imagine.*" But I say, wait until you *actually* see all the world, or half the world, or one-tenth of the world going once a month to confession; and, when you see this it will be

time enough for you to raise the question, *Where* will they find confessors? In the affair of salvation every one has his own soul to save, whatever the rest of the world may choose to do; and the question for you, or for any other individual, is, can you—*you, yourself*, can he, *he himself*—go once a month to confession. What say you to that question?

Penitent. O Father, putting the matter in that point of view, I must withdraw the objection.

Confessor. Well, that is the proper and practical point of view to put it; and, allow me to tell you, that I never met a man or woman, in town or country, who could allege that it would be impossible for them, if only they were in earnest, to go to confession once a month; and, further, I have known men overwhelmed, you would think, with business, public and private, who could make out time to go, not once a month but once a week, and instead of finding that they lost their time, or that their business suffered, they experienced that the regular habits they had to lead in order to live conformably

to their religious practices, enabled them to economize their time, and to do their business with greater order, and, therefore, with greater success.

Penitent. What you say, Father, has come under my own observation in several instances, and I hope it will be a lesson to me to do likewise. It is criminally foolish to look to what the world does, while we have the great maxim to look to, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

Confessor. Another means absolutely necessary, and, at the same time, most efficacious for preserving us in God's holy grace, is *prayer—earnest and constant prayer.*

In the conflict we have to maintain against the great enemy of our salvation, prayer must be our armour. With it we shall be victorious; without it we shall inevitably be worsted. "If," says our Saviour, "you ask the Father any thing in my name he will give it you." John, c. xvi. v. 23. And, again, he says, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." Luke, c. xxii. v. 43. St. James, in like manner, to inculcate

the necessity of prayer, says, "You have not, because you ask not." James, c. iv. v. 2. In a word, authorities without number could be adduced to prove the absolute necessity we are under, on the one side, of having continual recourse to God by prayer, and of the unbounded efficacy of prayer on the other, against all temptations. On this account, St. Liguori, after writing an entire treatise on the subject of prayer, showing chiefly its necessity and efficacy, closes the book with these remarkable words: "Being convinced of the absolute necessity of prayer, inculcated in numberless passages of the Old and New Testament, I have introduced into the missions of our congregation a rule, which has been observed for many years, and which prescribes that in every mission a sermon be preached on prayer; and I say, and I repeat, and I will repeat while I live, that our salvation depends altogether on prayer; that on that account all writers in their books, all preachers in their sermons, and all confessors in the tribunal of penance, should inculcate nothing with greater

zeal, than the practice of continual prayer, and that they should constantly exclaim and repeat, PRAY, PRAY, AND NEVER CEASE TO PRAY: FOR IF YOU PRAY, YOUR SALVATION IS SECURED; IF YOU NEGLECT PRAYER, YOUR PERDITION IS INEVITABLE."

Penitent. What an impressive exhortation, and from such a saint! But, Father, there are certain times and occasions (are there not?) that a person is bound more particularly to pray. I understand that every Christian should say his prayers morning and evening, and that Sundays and holidays should be days of prayer; and that we should recommend all our undertakings and works, at least those of any serious account, to Almighty God by prayer.

Confessor. Yes, and you will add, in all dangerous temptations to sin we should have *immediate* recourse to prayer, just as the soldier *immediately* seizes his arms when the enemy attacks him. Suppose, for instance, in the case of bad thoughts; the evil thought first comes before the mind; then the devil solicits a person to dwell upon it; and then again, to take

pleasure in dwelling upon it; and finally, to consent to it. Oh, how important it is to know how to act when thus assailed!

Penitent. What should I do, Father, in the circumstances?

Confessor. Turn your mind from the evil thought the moment it presents itself. If it continue to haunt you, your succor is prayer. Say, "O God, come to my aid! O Lord, make haste to help me! Let not my enemy prevail against me, nor the son of iniquity have power to hurt me." Or, addressing yourself to the Blessed Virgin, say, "Mary, my mother, pray for me." Or, thinking of your angel guardian you could invoke him, saying, "Holy guardian, guard and defend me." I say, if you do this, and continue to do so while the temptation lasts, you may defy legions of evil spirits, and all the powers of darkness.

Penitent. Yes, Father, and such ejaculations would not disturb any occupation, nor discompose a person in any company, so that the remedy is always at hand, and under all circumstances.

Confessor. Well, we shall proceed to another means of perseverance.

Penitent. But, Father, will you not say something more on prayer? I expected you would not leave off the subject without some special notice of *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*.

Confessor. You have just anticipated me; and it is with the view of laying special stress on that devotion, that I wish to notice it separately, and set it forth as a distinct means of perseverance in the friendship of God.

Confessor. I beg pardon, Father; I should not have interrupted you so inconsiderately.

Confessor. On the contrary, you edify me by your attachment to the devotion of the Blessed Virgin. Yes, O yes, my dear friend, what a means of perseverance! How many are in heaven that should now be in hell, were it not for their devotion to Mary—and, alas! how many are now in hell that should be in heaven, had they been devout to this unfailing advocate of sinners! O Mary, our life, our sweetness, and our hope. She is the specially beloved daughter of God the Father. She is the divinely privileged mother of God

the Son. She is the immaculate spouse of the Holy Ghost. In this threefold alliance which Mary has with the Three Divine Persons, must we not say that her influence is all-powerful to obtain for us the graces and mercies we stand in need of for time and eternity? And no less earnest is her desire to assist us. Who has had the share she has had in the mysteries whereby her Divine Son has wrought our redemption? If "he was wounded on account of our iniquities," if "he was bruised on account of our sins," was it not on the sacred body he took from Mary, that he received these atoning wounds, these mysterious bruises, whereby we are healed? And if by his sacred blood he redeemed us, was not this the blood he received from the immaculate womb of the Virgin? And when Mary stood beneath the cross, the sorrowing witness of the dying agonies of her Divine Son, did not her compassionate heart suffer as he suffered, and did she not unite her sufferings with his, in a common oblation for man's redemption? O Mary! we are the children of thy sorrow, and,

how could you cease to be interested for us, having suffered so much for us, and having had such a share in the mysteries of our redemption! Oh! my dear friend, pray to Mary, be devout to Mary, and your salvation is assured to you. I would recommend to you, as you are resolved to persevere in God's holy grace, to determine upon some *daily* practice of devotion in honor of Mary which you will henceforth perform, with unfailing punctuality, and that besides you will celebrate with particular piety her festivals, more particularly her solemn festivals, as they occur throughout the year.

Penitent. Thank you, Father, for this good advice. I shall, please God, adopt it.

Confessor. Another means, still, of persevering in God's grace is, *spiritual reading*, that is, *reading of religious books*.

Penitent. Yes, Father, pious reading should be a very effective means of perseverance. I often heard it said, it was pious reading that led the great St. Ignatius to consecrate himself to God.

Confessor. Yes; and before him, the great St. Augustine owed his conversion

to the same cause, under God. It is most reasonable, that pious reading should have a powerful influence upon our lives and habits. It operates upon us in the same way, as the company and conversation of holy people. For instance, if we daily conversed with St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Francis of Sales, St. Ignatius, St. Liguori, and others, we could hardly help living holy lives, on account of their example, and the influence of their society and conversation. But what admonitions, what instructions, or directions would they give us that we have not in the books they have left us? Thus it is that the practice of pious reading is so profitable. I would advise you the practice of reading a chapter, or some short portion, of a pious book every day, and of reading more at large on Sundays and holidays; and, I venture to assure you that you will derive signal profit from such a practice in steadying your habits, and establishing yourself in the constant service of God.

Penitent. Thank you again, Father,

and I shall be faithful to your excellent advice.

Confessor. Well, then, I might recommend to you many other observances; but I do not wish to burden you too much at once, and I will content myself by being assured that, if you avoid, and practice, what I have laid down for you to be avoided and practiced, you will not stop there, but, carried onward by a hunger and thirst for justice, you will never say "enough." On the contrary, your motto shall be, "he who is just, let him still be more justified; he who is holy, let him be still more sanctified."

Penitent. May God, in his boundless mercy, grant me grace to realize such charitable hopes; but, Father, lest I should forget even one of the excellent means laid down by you for persevering in the friendship of God, you will kindly permit me to try if I can repeat them.

Confessor. Certainly. Make yourself sure that you recollect them all.

Penitent. Well, then, Father, as well as I recollect, they are—*First*, An undying sorrow for past sin, which you recommend

ON GENERAL CONFESSIONS. 181

to be kept up by frequent penitential acts, such as certain prayers, or moderate practices of penance, which one would perform every day. *Secondly*, To avoid the immediate occasion of mortal sin, and, especially, such occasions as may have previously led a person into sin. *Thirdly*, the frequent use of the Sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist. *Fourthly*, earnest and persevering prayer, particularly in all dangerous occasions and temptations. *Fifthly*, devotion to the Blessed Virgin; and, *Sixthly*, the practice of pious reading.

Confessor. Most accurate; and it just occurs to me to give you, in addition to these means, a rule of life, which I have come by, and which was drawn up for the same purpose for which I have proposed to you the means of perseverance which you have just enumerated.

Penitent. Thank you, Father, and, while I tender to you the simple expression of my gratitude, I pray you to believe that I shall always retain in the deepest sincerity of my heart, the most grateful recollection of your charity and

zeal. To one so charitable as you are, it must be agreeable to learn that you have not labored in vain, as I fervently hope, in the pains you have taken with me; and, therefore, it is that I wish to disclose to you that your excellent instructions have wrought in me such a change of mind and heart, and have lifted up my feelings and desires toward heaven in such a way, that I shall walk henceforth as a pilgrim and a stranger in this world; and heaven and my God I shall always regard as my first beginning and last end, and the term of all my hopes and ambition; and now, dear Father, in taking my leave of you, and, thanking you again and again, let me place myself on my knees to crave your blessing.

Confessor. May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, descend upon you, and abide with you now and for ever. Amen.

RESOLUTIONS,

TO SERVE

AS A RULE OF LIFE AFTER A GENERAL CONFESSION.

1st. EVERY day, either at morning or night prayers, I shall repeat and consider these great truths: GOD SEES ME, and *beholds even the secrets of my heart.*—*I must die, and it may be this very day.*—*After my death I must be judged, and wo to me if I be found guilty of mortal sin not repented of.*—*Then begins Eternity, which I must spend amidst the joys of Heaven or the torments of Hell.*

2dly. Every day I shall be exact in saying my morning and night prayers, and at my night prayers I shall examine my conscience—I shall repeat the Angelus—say grace before and after meals—read a portion of a pious book, (were it only for five or ten minutes,) or recite a part of the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin.

3dly. Every Sunday I shall assist devoutly at Mass, and if possible at a sermon, and I shall read a *considerable portion* of a pious book.—I shall also consider the faults of the past week, and resolve to avoid them this week. Moreover, I shall examine how I have kept these resolutions, and I shall repeat them anew.

4thly. Every month, at least, I shall approach the Holy Sacraments of *Penance* and the *Blessed Eucharist*. But if I should have the misfortune of falling into mortal sin, I shall overcome every inconvenience, in order to go to Confession, *as soon as possible*, knowing that *a person in mortal sin, is liable at any moment to everlasting damnation*.

5thly. I shall avoid most carefully *every person, every place, and every thing* that would bring me into sin; but, above all, *such persons, such places, and such things* as have already led me into sin.

6thly. I shall make every effort, with the grace of God, to overcome *that temptation* which I know by experience to be most dangerous to me.

7thly. Every night I shall repeat the

following prayer, to obtain, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, the grace of persevering in these resolutions until death.

Prayer of St. Bernard.

REMEMBER, O most pious Virgin! that it was never heard of in any age; that those who implored, and had recourse to thy powerful protection, were ever abandoned by thee. I, therefore, O sacred Virgin, animated with the most lively confidence, cast myself at thy sacred feet, most earnestly and fervently beseeching thee to adopt me, though a wretched sinner, for thy perpetual child, to take care of my eternal salvation, and to watch over me at the hour of my death. O do not, Mother of the Word Incarnate! despise my prayers, but graciously hear and obtain the granting of my petitions. Amen.

THE END.

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